

# *Be a Believer and Keep the Faith*

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**M**y brothers and sisters, I am overwhelmed by this large audience this evening. It is a real privilege for me to be with you. I didn't realize so many would be present, but the Brethren who have preceded me here have always come back with a glorious account of the visit and the tremendous numbers who attend these fireside gatherings.

I wish to discuss a few miscellaneous things with you. But to get myself settled, I'd like to say that I'm very proud of the Church. We are all contributing to its growth and progress. The membership is increasing. The Church is progressing well. It is getting stronger, and it is prospering. Otherwise the many buildings that have been erected, new temples constructed, and many two-ward and stake buildings could not have come into being.

I remember in the Maricopa Arizona Stake the stake president at one time was looking forward to the day when the Maricopa Stake would pay \$100,000 in tithing. There are about thirteen stakes that cover the same area at the present time, and I think each of those stakes is contributing over a million dollars annually to the tithing of the Church. The Church is not only prospering here, but it is also prospering in faraway places. I will have an opportunity near the end of this month to attend an area

conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and then the following week in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This is bringing the Church closer to our people in these foreign places, and they are beginning to realize that we are not just a Utah church or a United States church, but we are worldwide in our operation. So, again I say the Church is increasing in numbers, it is progressing, it is prospering, it is growing stronger. We are better known and better received by the peoples of the world than we have ever been.

## **Lengthen Your Stride**

When the Church was 120 years old, the membership at that time was approximately 1,100,000. Today it is between 3,400,000 and 3,500,000. In 1950 there were 180 stakes in the Church. Today there are approximately 680. I know many more have been approved for organization but have not been organized yet. At that time we had about 42 missions; we now have 113 missions. There have been six or seven more approved since the first of the year that

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are unorganized at this time. Then we had about 2,000 missionaries in the field; today we have approximately 18,500. So you see the Church is growing, and it is prospering. I feel you students (I presume that most of you are students of the University) have contributed, not in funds perhaps, but certainly in time pursuing the missionary cause of the Church.

President McKay during his Presidency said all members of the Church were missionaries. We are trying to get that spirit into the missionary movement of the Church. We are not only pushing—"lengthening our stride," as President Kimball called it—the full-time missionary effort, but we are also putting great reemphasis upon stake missions. We feel that if sufficient stake missionaries are called, they can increase considerably the growing membership, because wards have all the programs, activities, and buildings necessary to invite their investigators and friends to.

I think you are contributing in another way: by your conduct, your maintenance of the BYU code of honor, meeting the standards of good dressing and grooming. And surely your conduct, both on and off campus, is being observed by many. It is adding greatly to the prestige of the Church and to the school itself. As the school becomes more prestigious, then the Church is benefited and greatly blessed. I think we should all fully support this "lengthening our stride" movement under the leadership of President Kimball. And certainly your help is necessary to carry out his wishes. I am sure the Lord has inspired him in this great missionary program, and to "lengthen our stride" refers to many other activities we have in the Church.

Another thing that is helping us much is the temples that are being constructed. There are others approved but not yet announced. The counsel Joseph F. Smith gave that we should do things for the convenience of the people is coming to pass with this building program and in the missionary work, bringing many into the Church from foreign lands.

One of the missions in Mexico, with ninety-five missionaries, this past year baptized over six-thousand converts. Over one thousand of those were baptized in one month. The great problem there is developing priesthood leadership fast enough to take care of this great conversion number. We must develop the priesthood of the Church. We must activate the inactive priesthood bearers. There are many inactive men who would make tremendous leaders, tremendous teachers, if we could just harness them and bring them into the fold of activity.

### **Seek First the Kingdom of God**

Theodore Roosevelt once said that every man should join some worthwhile institution and then do all in his power to set forward the aims and the objectives of that institution. That suggestion is very good. We have a great requirement as members of the Church. The Lord put it in this way: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). I do keenly feel that the first obligation we as members of the Church have is to build and strengthen the kingdom of God. We don't need to seek it, because we have it, but we do have the responsibility of preparing ourselves to give our first allegiance to the Church.

I know there are men who are forming organizations for the purpose of bringing peace to a war-torn world—a world of nations that seemingly cannot get along well together—but I don't think any man can introduce a peace program that will settle the differences of mankind. There is only one plan of peace, in my judgment, and that is the gospel plan. So I feel, by owing our first allegiance to the Church, we should do all we can to promote the work of the Church and see that the gospel gets to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. The Lord has said that when that is accomplished the end will come.

I know some organizations are good for men who do not have the gospel and the

priesthood as we have in the Church. Perhaps it is a good outlet for them and one that they should take advantage of. But in the Church we priesthood bearers should do all that we can to promote the gospel. If we want peace in the earth, then the people of the world must be introduced to the gospel. How else can they be introduced to the gospel unless we take it to them? I am sure that this is what President Kimball has in mind.

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that President Kimball is a very choice individual. (I don't say that because he comes from Arizona; he *is* a tremendous individual.) He is an inspired servant of God. During the time he has been in office, he has brought into focus many areas that need full attention, and his phrase "to lengthen our stride" is very meaningful. It does not apply to only one phase of the Church program but applies in many different areas. He is giving progressive leadership. I don't know how he accomplishes the work he does. He is a very hard worker; he puts in many hours. I doubt that he gets much sleep. Even though he has had open-heart surgery, he has overcome that problem. He is just as alert and active and nimble as a man can possibly be. I know for a surety that if we follow his teachings, if we follow his example, we will never go wrong. He is one man in the Church that can say, as the Savior once said, "Come follow me, and do the things ye have seen me do." I have that confidence in President Kimball. I am sure we can follow him with safety, and we need to support him fully. If the people of the Church are united, it is because they support the President of the Church. I don't think for a moment President Kimball would ask you to do something that he himself wouldn't do. He is that kind of an individual.

### **Keep the Commandments**

The work of the kingdom calls for preparation and participation in the Church programs. We should all remember that we are children

of God and that we are living here on earth in a probationary state. We are here to prove ourselves, to see whether we are entitled to the mansions that our Heavenly Father has prepared for the faithful of this people. The Lord has given us our free agency; he is not compelling us to keep the commandments. But I am sure that for our best good we should keep the commandments and the laws he has given. It is like the Word of Wisdom: the Lord didn't give it by way of commandment, but he did give it to us by way of revelation. Being our God, the Eternal Father of our spirits, knowing the things that are best for us, he surely wouldn't give us a revelation unless it was for our good. So whether it is a commandment or not, it seems to me that we should be obedient in the observance of that revelation or any revelation which he has given. In enjoying our free agency, we should always choose the right. I know, having free agency, we can also choose the wrong. We can stumble into pitfalls Satan is laying for us. He would be very happy if he could persuade us to follow him instead of following the Christ.

The Lord has built into each and every one of us a power by which we can overcome any evil or every temptation that may come into our lives. For he has said: "The power is in [you], wherein [you] are agents unto [yourselves]" (D&C 58:28). I am sure if we use that power right we can walk uprightly before the Lord and gain his favor and blessings which we so much need in this very difficult time in which we live. We ought to weigh everything carefully and prayerfully and be sure we choose the right and not the wrong. After all, the good example of our people will strengthen the image of the Church more than all our teachings put together. This is true on this campus. Your example in this Church institution is now known the world over and will add great strength, not only to the University, but also to the Church.

### **Study the Scriptures**

We need to comprehend life and its purpose. We need to study the scriptures, maybe more completely and thoroughly than we now are. It is our duty to learn the laws and commandments the Lord has given for the blessing and the salvation and exaltation of his children here upon the earth. We are here to receive a mortal body. A spirit child of God will come and inhabit that body. We should keep it clean because, after we pass on and our body is placed in the grave, sometime in the future it will be resurrected and each spirit will come back and claim its own body. We should make up our minds what kind of a body we want our spirit to inhabit, what kind of a body we want to maintain so that the spirit may dwell and progress and receive the inspiration of the Almighty.

To get a clear picture and a clear understanding of what is expected of us, we should study the four standard works of the Church. We should also study the writings of the prophets, including those of the Prophet Joseph Smith, down to the present time. We must abide by the teachings, not only of the dead prophets, but also of the living prophets. It seems that some people are more anxious to follow those who have passed on than to recognize the living prophet among us. We don't want to say anything against the prophets who lived before our prophet of today, because they have all been tremendous spiritual leaders. President Kimball is our present leader, and he is the one we should follow.

I believe that sometimes we are thinking too much about this mortal life in which we live, and we are overlooking that future eternal life. Our mortal existence is very brief when we compare it to the eternal life that lies before us. So we ought to picture ourselves, if we can, in that eternal, celestial sphere, according to the pattern of life that we are now living. I wonder if we would be happy with that picture. Would it be desirable? Would it accomplish for us the

things that the Lord has prepared for the faithful of his children? It is something for all of us to think about. Along with it I would like to say to you young people, keep your lives sweet and clean before the Lord.

Someday you are going to pair off and marry and establish homes of your own. I presume if you came from good homes you would like to pattern your home after the one you came from. When children come to bless your home, will you have a real Latter-day Saint home prepared for them, where the gospel is taught, where the gospel is lived, where there is love and harmony between parents? Wouldn't it be wonderful if each one of you when you do reach parenthood, could use the examples of your own lives in the teaching of your children? That is something to think about. I am sure, if you are not inhibited by transgressions or violation of the moral law in any way, you would not hesitate talking to your children about these intimate matters they are concerned about. Perhaps you may not feel free to express yourself, but you would want to answer their questions and give them the counsel and advice which they so much need. I am sure that most of you will establish homes of this kind, and I would hope that you can use the example of your own lives in the teaching of your children. The task won't be too difficult if you have kept yourselves clean. The Lord wants us to be honest. He wants us to be upright. He wants us to be humble and prayerful. He is the source of our strength when we need help. We should turn to him in prayer for that help.

### **Prepare to Meet Temptation**

I wonder, brothers and sisters, if you have made up your minds as to how you want to live. Have you made up your minds how you will react to temptation, should it come into your lives? The day in which we live is full of temptations, and I wonder if you have resolved yourselves to stake on the Lord's side and follow the counsel and instruction that he has

given and that has been passed on to you by the prophets and the servants of his church.

I remember a fast and testimony meeting that I attended in my ward—I occasionally have opportunity to do so. On this particular day a young man arose to bear his testimony. He said, “When I was younger, I often thought how I would react if temptation should come into my life. Would I yield to the temptation, or would I have the strength and the power to resist it? I thought and prayed about it. I made up my mind, if temptation should come into my life, that I would resist that temptation. Ultimately temptation did come into my life, and I thank God to this day that I had prepared myself against that temptation and it wasn’t difficult for me to resist.”

I don’t think, brothers and sisters, that we can afford to wait until temptation does come into our lives. Before that time we should make up our minds how we are going to react to that temptation. If we haven’t made up our minds, when temptation does come, it will be too late in many cases. We have to determine how we are going to live our lives. We must always remember that we are chosen children of God. Wouldn’t it be a shame to forsake our God and to follow after Satan’s evil temptations? I am sure Satan dresses temptations up in enticements that are very attractive, very alluring, but if we know the mind and will of the Lord on these matters that concern us, we will have the power to resist that temptation.

There is another thing that bothers me that quite often happens: people are recommended for positions or privileges in the Church who are not worthy for those privileges. Any man who holds the priesthood and is in a leadership position exceeds his authority when he grants an unworthy person a privilege in the Church he is not entitled to, like going to the temple, for example. I am sure there is some deceit. And if a person by deceit gains a recommend with the approval of the bishop and the stake president and enjoys that privilege, I don’t think he gets

the blessing. The Holy Spirit of promise would *never* seal an unworthy person’s blessings. So remember that all these very choice privileges we have in the Church are based upon our worthiness. We get the blessings if we are worthy; it turns to our condemnation if we are not worthy. I’m sure all of us would like to feel good and worthy when these privileges are granted to us.

### **Receive the Blessings of Mortality**

I’d like to read what one girl had to say regarding the moral standards of the Church. She said:

*The moral standards of the world differ greatly from those of the Church. . . . Being in an environment where there is a majority of Church members doesn’t keep Satan from tempting us. Wherever we are, we are subject to his temptations. He wants us to be immodest and immoral. He wants us to defile our holy temples. I know when you have a deep love for someone it may be hard to control your emotions, . . . but if you stop to realize how much you will be hurting yourself and the people you love the most, especially Heavenly Father, you may receive the strength to say no. . . .*

*Heavenly Father loves each one of us so much that I imagine he must cry when he sees his sons and daughters throwing away something so precious—their purity and virtue—for a fleeting moment of [weakness and supposed] pleasure. . . . One of my goals is to have a temple marriage. As I kneel at the altar with my chosen mate, I want him to know that I have kept myself pure and clean for him only, and I want to be able to know that he has done the same for me.*

*In this world, where immodesty and immorality are so abundant, isn’t that a most beautiful scene—two people in love, so pure and virtuous before their Heavenly Father, kneeling at the altar of his holy temple?*

I remember some years ago getting a letter from a young woman who was awaiting the return

of her missionary fiancé in order that they could be married. She outlined in her letter all the things she was doing to prepare herself worthily for that glorious experience. She went to the temple for her endowments before he returned from his mission, and she had the privilege of witnessing some sealings of children to their parents. What a beautiful thing she said it was. She had a great desire that her marriage would be in one of the sacred temples of our God.

I'd like to read you one other letter. This letter is from a missionary who was excommunicated in the mission field because of immorality. The letter is addressed to President McKay. At that time I was responsible for handling the excommunication and disfellowshipment cases, and the letter was referred to me. I removed his name from it. This is one of the finest letters on repentance, the seeking of forgiveness, and the desire to return to the Church that I have ever read. I would like to share it with you. The young man told about being excommunicated because of immorality, and he said:

*The spirit worked upon me while I was in the mission field, and I was sorry for my sins and sickened by them. I read a great deal in the Book of Mormon, seeking somewhat to justify not going to the mission president and confessing. I read about Alma and Corianton and tried to convince myself that since I had repented (I thought) I would not need to confess to anyone but God. I did pray a great deal for many weeks. After everyone else had gone to bed, I would remain up reading and praying. Finally, one night a voice from within me said, "You know what you must do, so do it."*

*A few days after that we had a conference of the missionaries in the area, and I confessed to the mission president. I knew I would be excommunicated, but I had no choice if I was ever to obtain forgiveness.*

*After I had confessed, even knowing I would be excommunicated, I felt an extremely sweet peace in my soul. . . . I thank God to this day that he gave me the courage to do it.*

*My family was extremely kind and understanding, as was the bishop when I went to see him. The bishop told me he thought it would be a good idea for me to get up in priesthood meeting in the ward and ask for their forgiveness, which I did. It was extremely difficult and caused me much sorrow, but I'm thankful I did it. Then, the bishop told me I should go out and greet and shake hands with the people as they came to Sunday School; I'm thankful I did that also, for it made things easier for me and them. They all fully forgave me and accepted me back. Their true Christianity helped me to have strength to go to church all the time, at least to the meetings I could go to.*

*As of late, my desire for baptism has increased, and I desire it and the other blessings attendant to righteousness more than any other thing.*

*I went home a short while back, and the bishop told me he had been to Salt Lake and had gotten a list of things I had to do before I could be baptized. This made me desire forgiveness more than ever. . . .*

*Since this weekend was fast Sunday, I started fasting Friday after supper, and Saturday I went into the mountains and spent about five hours by myself thinking and praying, and I read a little from the Book of Mormon. While praying aloud to my Father, I tasted the most bitter sorrow that I have tasted to date. I had a slight taste of what it really is to suffer godly sorrow for sin. I left my complete dependence on the Father and the Son for salvation, and I pleaded that I would be forgiven for my sins and for being such a great cause of suffering to the Lord, Jesus Christ. I understood ever so vaguely that Christ did take upon himself my sins and he suffered untold sorrow for me. I begged for forgiveness and for release from the deadening, prisonlike effects of sin and to know that I was forgiven.*

*I felt impressed that I should write the letters that I must write and request baptism and that I would receive forgiveness if I continued to be humble, fast, and pray. I think I will have to suffer sorrow like I did yesterday many times again before all the evil effects of sin will be lifted out of me and I will feel that freedom that my spirit craves for.*

*Sometimes I feel it reaching out for the more spiritual that is in life, but because of the body being prisoner to sin and its effect, it cannot reach what it and I desire.*

*President McKay, I ask in all humility, realizing that the responsibilities of membership are great, that I might be accepted back into the Church and back onto the path I departed from. I know God lives, that his Son Jesus Christ really did take upon himself our sins, and that he lives today. I know the Church was restored through the beloved Prophet Joseph Smith and that all the keys remain today and that you are a prophet, seer, and revelator and hold the keys of the kingdom. Please permit me to enter the waters of baptism and receive again the Holy Ghost. President McKay, I know this is only one step, but I desire with all my heart to be baptized again, and I will continue and do all that is necessary to gain that goal if it be God's will. I submit this letter and request to you and ask to be forgiven of my sins. May God bless you and give you health to continue your work and his work. . . .*

*I think also I should tell you that I observe the Word of Wisdom, and I have been sending tithing to my mother. She pays it to the bishop in my father's name. I have felt that the money was the Lord's and I could not steal it.*

I have one other thing to say in closing. I would like to quote a statement by President McKay which I think is choice. This was given to members of the Twelve in the upper room of the temple. He spoke of making God the center of our lives, and he said:

*When God becomes the center of our lives we lose self, we covenant to forget self. How perfectly our Lord and Savior sets the example. He did not seek to perpetuate his physical life, but he sought to develop the spirit, living for others with God as the center,*

*and thus he saved his life, perpetuated it eternally—the only perfect man who ever walked the earth, the one who broke the bonds of death and brought eternal life. If our young people would not think of themselves in the hour of temptation but just forget self and think of mother and of father, of the good name of the family, and just lose themselves a moment for somebody else, they would have the power to resist temptation. If we could just make God the center of our lives when dealing with his children, we would have sufficient strength to overcome our weaknesses. When God becomes the center of our lives we become conscious of a new goal in life—spiritual attainment.*

Moroni said, "If ye have not faith in him [Christ] then ye are not fit to be numbered among the people of his church" (Moroni 7:39). I hope all of us are fit to be numbered among the people of his church. I would like to paraphrase that quote: "If ye have not faith in Christ and his doctrine and teachings, then ye are not fit to be numbered among the people of his church." Brothers and sisters, this Church is true. We owe it our allegiance. We should keep the commandments of our Lord. We should walk uprightly before him. We should do all things that would support the work of his kingdom upon this earth. That, of course, means supporting President Spencer W. Kimball in his high and holy calling. May God be with you. May he bless you with wisdom, with judgment, with right choices, and may you always desire to serve, to bless people, and to remember that the great purpose of the Church and its leadership is to save and bless people. When we lose that understanding, we have lost the spirit of our work. God bless you I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.