

# Something to Think About

NATHAN ELDON TANNER

I feel honored, indeed, to have this opportunity of addressing you this evening. I enjoyed that lovely rendition by the choir and wish to congratulate them. As we came in here this evening, I said to Sister Tanner, “It’s such a beautiful day. Why would people come out to listen to me tonight?” I’d really like to have the answer. As I was invited to come down here, they asked me to come and speak to a ten-stake fireside. Before I got here, it was a twelve-stake fireside. That gives you a little idea of how the Church is growing.

I told in the general priesthood meeting of my experience in Caracas, Venezuela, last March. We had a meeting of the members and the investigators. I don’t know how many were there. The mission president said there were five hundred, but they have a practice of exaggerating just a little. There might have been three or four hundred there, at least. As I got up to speak to them, I said, “I’d like to get a little better acquainted with this group. All those who were baptized in 1974 and 1975 please stand.” Quite a group of them stood. Then I said, “Those who were baptized in 1973 stand,” and another group stood. And I continued for 1972, 1971, and 1970. Then I said, “All those who have been in the Church over five years, please stand,” and three stood. The

president of the mission turned to me and said, “They don’t belong here.” And I asked, “Are you people visiting here or do you live here?” They said, “We’re visitors.”

You belong to a Church that is really going forward under the direction of the Lord through a prophet of God, and how fortunate we are to be members of that Church and kingdom. I’d like to see you members of the new BYU Eleventh and Twelfth stakes—I don’t care how many there would be—stand just a minute so I can talk to you. You’re pretty well scattered through the audience. Do you mind if I talk to you this evening? As I was trying to think of something to talk to you about I thought the safest thing for me to say is that my title is “Something to Think About.” I humbly pray that I might say something that will be helpful to someone. I really feel great concern when I’m called to speak to a group like this, a very choice group, wherever it may be. You have a choice future because of your understanding of the gospel, and the world and the Church are going to be very well

*N. Eldon Tanner was a member of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 1 June 1975.*

blessed because they have people like you who will be leading and conducting and directing the affairs, not only of the Church, but also of the communities in which you live.

### **Follow Good Examples**

We have the restored gospel, which is the gospel in its fulness and which the world does not have. The world does not have the Book of Mormon, it doesn't have the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, or modern revelation, nor a prophet of God to direct any of them. And that's where we are blessed. BYU students are so fortunate to have the organizations that exist here upon this campus, where all of the activities of the branches are provided, where every one of you can take part. Most of you come from homes where the gospel is understood and taught and lived. What a great blessing that is! You also have regular stake conference. You have these firesides, ten-, now twelve-stake, firesides, where the General Authorities come to speak to you. No other place in the world do young people have these opportunities and experiences, and it makes me feel very humble as I stand before you tonight.

Then you also have the general conferences, which you may attend or listen to over the radio and television. Last conference we had over forty General Authorities bear testimony regarding the truthfulness of the gospel. And you know the kind of testimonies they bear.

I'd like to emphasize this point: that these are men of valor; they're men of faith. They're honest, honorable men in every way. They wouldn't be telling you any lies. They're not stupid; they're men who know what they are talking about. And if any of you do not have testimonies here tonight, I would suggest that you listen to and accept the testimonies of these General Authorities and others who bear testimonies throughout the Church.

If you had two people come in here tonight and tell you that something was taking place

out here or something had taken place in South Africa, where I've just come from, you'd believe them. You'd say, I know it's true because these are honest men, and they wouldn't tell us anything but what is right. Now these forty-odd (I don't mean they're odd; I mean more than forty) people bore testimonies to us at that general conference, and they bear testimony wherever they go. We have these regular devotionals and firesides here at this campus, which is not common throughout the world. We have a prophet of God directing this Church, or at least the Lord Jesus Christ himself is directing this Church through a prophet of God. We also have modern revelations.

Now, I have prayed that I might deal with and help you to understand what the Church offers you, what your responsibilities are, the blessings that are in store for those who will accept those responsibilities and live according to the teachings of the gospel, and the effect that you will have on others. I realize that I'm not going to tell you anything new tonight. I am trying, however, to emphasize those things that are important in our lives.

Before going forward with my talk I should like to bring you greetings from President Kimball. He's been here. He goes wherever it's possible for him to go to speak to people throughout the Church. He sent his blessings tonight to you, knowing that I was going to be here. He loves you; he wants you to succeed; he wants you to be happy; he wants you to be the kind of people that the Lord will bless and be happy to have as members of his Church and kingdom here upon the earth.

As I bring you greetings from President Kimball, I was reminded when being introduced to you tonight, I've had the great privilege of being a counselor to four of the Presidents of the Church, four prophets of God. I've always known that the Presidents of the Church were prophets of God. Having had this privilege of associating with them,

counseling with them, sitting at their feet, you might say, day after day, and seeing how the Lord works through them, I want to bear you my testimony that I know as I know I stand here that they are prophets of God and that the Lord works through them to direct his Church here upon the earth.

Speaking for the exemplary homes that most of you come from, I hope all of the homes from which you come are made up of God-fearing people, people who are honest and true and virtuous, people who want you to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ and who are seeking after righteousness. You do not have the conditions that many in the world have today. Let me just tell you a little story that I have told before, about a young couple killed in an automobile accident. As people came to the scene of that accident they saw a whiskey bottle half empty. When the father saw it he went into a rage and said, "I'll kill the man who gave these kids that whiskey." But when he went home that night he saw in his liquor cabinet a note from his daughter. It said, "Dad, I hope you don't mind our taking your whiskey tonight."

Now, you don't have those examples and those problems. You're so fortunate to come from homes where those conditions do not exist, and to attend a university where the gospel principles are taught and standards are upheld.

This statement from Dudley Swim has been oft repeated, but I'd like to read it again tonight:

*As a somewhat disillusioned Presbyterian, I must say that I give thanks for the heartening example of the Mormon Church and the educational institutions which it maintains. A few million dollars given there, I have confidence, will fulfill the expectations of the donor: and, regrettably, I have almost equal confidence that any such gifts to the institutions which have yielded to the sophistry and immorality that have swept academia in recent*

*years can only produce betrayal of the faith and expectations of a responsible donor.*

### **Be an Example**

Last week a new stake presidency was sustained in the Monterey Stake, and the new president of that stake came up with his wife to talk to the General Authority who had established that stake and introduced them to the stake members. The president of that stake said, "I met this young lady, my wife, at BYU. I was a nonmember of the Church. I don't know why I went to BYU, but I did. I met this girl and fell in love with her. As I told her that I'd fallen in love with her and would like to have her as my wife, she said, 'I'll marry you only in the temple.' I didn't understand what the temple was, but when she said that, I began to investigate, and as a result we were married in the temple. I am where I am today because she was prepared to take her individual stand and do that which is right. Regardless of our relationship otherwise, the only way she would be married was in the temple. So we were married in the temple. I know five other couples who can tell you the same kind of story, that they met LDS girls who were not prepared at any cost to give up the standards of their Church, and as a result they are holding stake offices here in this stake." Those are things, I think, my brothers and sisters, that we should keep in mind.

I have told this next story many times, and I want to tell it again tonight. There is a returned missionary who is attending the University of Utah, and he and his companion were called as stake missionaries because he liked his missionary work so much. They were teaching the gospel to a family, and after they'd given the second or third discussion, the father said, "I want nothing more to do with this. It's a lot of nonsense to say that God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ would appear to a boy. I want no more of it. I don't want you to come back at all."

But he had a daughter who was eighteen or nineteen years of age who believed what they were saying, and after a while she asked her father if she could be baptized. He said, “no, not until you’ve reached the age of maturity. If you still feel the same way, that’s your responsibility.”

She was going out with a young man and was telling him about the Church. That’s not what he was taking her out for, and he said, “Listen, I don’t want to hear any more about this Church. We’ve talked about it before, and I don’t want to hear anything more. You may choose tonight between me and the Church.” She shed some tears; she liked this young man and thought a lot of him. After they’d talked it over, she said, “I must choose the Church, because I know it’s true.”

Now, that takes a lot of fortitude, a lot of determination, but she did it. When she went home, she was very upset. Her father noticed she was and wanted to know what was wrong. After some persuasion she told him just exactly what had happened. He said, “If the Church means that much to you, you may be baptized.” A few weeks later she was baptized, and not only her parents were there to see her baptized but also this boy who told her to choose between him and the Church. As a result, sometime later they were all three baptized, and these two young people are married and living happily together. What a sad thing it would have been had she said, “Well, I just must not give up this opportunity to be with you the rest of my life.” They’re happy. She took her stand, and she was blessed accordingly.

We have the gospel in its fulness, which the world does not understand. People in the world today cannot understand the gospel in its fulness because they do not have it. How fortunate we are to know, through the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants and modern revelation, that we had a premortal existence, that we are actually spirit children

of God. That passes over the heads of so many people. We’ve heard it so many times, but some of us have not accepted it—that we’re literally spirit children of God. We have the spirit here and we have the mortal body here, and they’re united; and when we leave this mortal existence, the spirit goes on. Later we are literally resurrected; the spirit and body are reunited. Now, that isn’t taught and it isn’t understood and it isn’t accepted by many, many hundred of thousands of people throughout the world. But we are spirit children of God. As such our potential is unlimited, but as such we are expected to act as spirit children of God, as his own children, who we are, that we might live worthy of his blessings.

I’d like to tell you about a former Lutheran minister who was baptized into the Church. He said he had found a pearl of great price and was prepared to give up everything for it. He was well settled as a minister of the Lutheran Church. He had a good home, a good job, and was well-respected by everybody. But he said when he found *the* pearl of great price, though it took some time, he was prepared to sell all that he had and accept that pearl of great price. I quote from a talk he gave after his baptism:

“A year and a half ago, an LDS family asked me to teach two of their sons piano. One of them played tonight during the sacrament meeting. Last summer, an LDS family asked me to teach three of their children piano. In dealing with not only these young people, but their parents, their families, I dealt quite closely with them. I began to realize that there was something very special about the Mormon people, a people somehow set apart as far as I could tell. I didn’t know what it was, but it was something that I began to want.

“What’s in a decision? The Holy Ghost, let me tell you, really works with young people. I think that they were probably the most active in our conversion because those young people didn’t do a super selling job—they were just themselves. They were simply fantastic. Those

young people were thrilling to work with, and they still are. They did a tremendous job of evangelism.

“What’s in a decision? Brothers and sisters, there’s a world waiting outside for you and me. In Luke 10:2 we read, ‘Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.’ Are we going to sit back and take things easy? Are we going to sit by and do nothing? Or are we going to decide to help that world out there waiting for you and for me to decide on the greatest decision of their lives? If you and I allow the Holy Ghost to work through us, the impossible will become possible. Frustration will become peace, and the seekers will become finders. It happened to our family, and I am thankful to almighty God. I am thankful to the many people who were his tools that it did happen.

“What’s in a decision? It is the Holy Ghost working through you and through me. That’s what’s in a decision. I bear you my testimony tonight that this is the true Church. I believe it with all my heart. I bear you my testimony that we have living prophets today. They are revealing great truths from God to us this very day. I sincerely believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet. I thank God every day that we have the restored Church. I thank God every day that Jesus lives. I thank God that we have a wonderful Church filled with people, so that Jesus not only lives but he lives through these people. You and I have a great job to do, and I pray to our Heavenly Father that we will not let him down. The harvest is very ripe, and you can’t wait too long. I bear you my testimony that all these things are true in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.”

That was the talk given by a man who had heard of the Church a year and a half before and who had been a successful, well-respected minister in the Lutheran Church.

Wherever we go, if our eyes are open we find people who are very happy because of their experience with members of the Church and because they have joined the Church. I’d like to say to you tonight that the world, where the people understand, accepts the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed to Joseph Smith in these latter days. And again how fortunate we are to have that gospel! Let us not take it for granted, but let us take it as a blueprint of life and thank the Lord every day for the gospel.

### **Have Integrity**

The Lord said unto us, “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise” (D&C 82:10). There are those on the campus who ignore the rules and the regulations which they agreed to keep and who see how far they can go and get away with it. In fact, they themselves and some of their associates are hypocrites; they cannot be trusted. They’re degrading themselves and are in danger of destruction. Some have even lied when interviewed for missions and temple recommends. I wonder what they hope to gain by living this way and lying about the way they are living.

A friend of mine a few years ago learned that his sixteen-year-old boy was smoking. One evening when this family had finished their meal and were sitting around the table, the father took out a package of cigarettes and started passing it around. He took one and said, “Let’s have a little smoke tonight together as we visit.”

And the first person he handed it to said, “Why, Dad, you know we don’t smoke. I couldn’t smoke.” He passed it around getting about the same response from the others. But this sixteen-year-old boy said, “Dad, I wouldn’t care for a cigarette.”

The father said, “Why, go ahead and take one. If you’re going to smoke, let us smoke together. Let us enjoy life together. Don’t be disassociating yourself from the family. Come

on. Let us have a smoke together." Of course they didn't smoke.

Brethren and sisters, let us put ourselves in the position always where we will do those things that we'd be glad to have our father and mother know we were doing. Never go around trying to hide the things that you're doing, being dishonest, being unreliable, being the kind of people that the Lord wouldn't choose and you wouldn't choose yourself for your associates. Be the kind of person that the Lord can look down on with thanksgiving and blessings. You know what the Lord said about hypocrites.

I don't understand why we do many of the things that we do. I'd like to read to you about keeping the Word of Wisdom. This is a statement, made by Victor B. Cline, which you were kind enough to give me, Brother Wilkinson.

*That three million people would start smoking each year is rather amazing when you consider the almost total lack of rational reasons to commence such an activity in the first place and the great many reasons not to—such as its serious health hazards, cost of the habit, its addicting qualities, its contribution to bad breath, its offense to non-smokers, its contamination and pollution of the ambient air with carbon monoxide, which can present a serious problem in enclosed spaces like restaurants, elevators, offices, stores, restrooms, theaters, public conveyances, etc. Also, consider that on every package of cigarettes purchased as well as in every cigarette advertisement there is an added determined message: "Warning: The Surgeon General has determined that cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health."*

*If one is a nonsmoker, not hooked, why would anybody in their right mind take up this habit, which almost every logical argument would suggest is self-destructive and inimical to the individual's self-interest?*

*I would suggest that the answer can be found, in part, in what I would term "persuasive communications," a powerful form of behavior*

*manipulation, and control, honed to a fine art by commercial advertisers.*

One who is behind those advertisers is Satan himself, who is determined to destroy us at all costs and will use every method possible to accomplish his ends. He has determined that he will destroy mankind and the work of the Lord.

Let me give you another example. Last time I talked here I gave you this example, but because a young woman came up to me after the talk and questioned me about it I want to repeat it tonight. A bishop in California called me just before general conference and said, "President Tanner, I have a young man here who is having real problems, and he would like to meet you because he thinks you can help him. He knows you are interested in young people and have had experience with them."

I said, "If you bring him over I'll be very happy to talk to him at conference time." He brought him over and he was dressed as a hippie—every sign: hair, clothes, and everything. I said, "What is your problem?"

He said, "I'll tell you. I'm a returned missionary. I filled a good mission, I believe. But when I came home something happened to cause me to get this rebellious feeling, and I went out determined that the Church wasn't going to tell me what to do. I was going to choose my own life and live as I felt I would like to live and be free. And I became associated with these hippies. Today I'm a slave. I'm a drug addict. I am guilty of a felony. I am one who is evading the law." We talked for some time. Then he said, "I have a wife and I have a child, and here I am in this condition. It isn't what I wanted, it isn't what I want, but I am in this situation." We talked it over, and at my suggestion he agreed that he would disassociate himself from the group, that he would clean himself up, and go back and turn himself over to the law.

Just a few weeks later, I received a letter from him. It started out this way, "Dear President Tanner, I'm writing from behind prison walls." Then he reviewed our conversation, and he said, "If your use of this letter would help anybody determine never to touch drugs or to associate with or become a part of any such group, please feel free to use it."

It was when I had finished telling that story the last time I was here that someone came up and said, "President Tanner, I can't understand your saying, 'Have nothing to do with those people.' I think the Lord wants us to help everyone we can."

I said, "I agree with you fully, but don't become a part of it. Live in the world, but don't be of the world. If an individual comes to you, be as helpful as you possibly can. If you have a friend who is having problems, talk to that friend and try to influence that friend for good. But don't become in any way associated with them in the things that they are doing."

We have those, too, who seem to think it's smart to do things which they know they should not do. We have some who want to have the praise of men or of their contemporaries rather than the praise of God and the praise of their stake presidents and bishops, and their University president and professors. They want to see how far they can go in immorality, and then some of them boast to their friends and their associates of their escapades. Now, brothers and sisters, that is the most foolish thing it is possible for you to do. Nothing can be gained. As I have said before, don't be a hypocrite. Don't be a coward. Have the courage and the strength to stand up and be counted and do those things which you know are right. The Lord will bless you, and those who ridicule you will love you and respect you and choose your association.

When I was in South America I met a young man who was a graduate of BYU. He had been born and raised in Argentina and was the one who interpreted for President

Kimball all the time the prophet talked at the different sessions of the area conference. This young man set about to learn what he could of the gospel, and he became student body president of BYU. Then he went out to work for Gillette. Today he is the head of the Gillette Razor Corporation in the whole of South America. He had the courage, desire, and determination to do what was right, to be honest and honorable and upright in his dealings, worthy of the love and respect of those with whom he associated.

The eyes of the world are upon us, brothers and sisters. Some of you have heard of Johnny Miller. He and Billy Casper are the only golf champions that are ever known by their Church affiliation. Every time the newsmen write about him or every time they speak of him, they mention that Johnny Miller is a Mormon. I'm happy to say that everything they say about him is very complimentary. There was also a hijacker here not too long ago—I hate to mention this—but of all of the hijackers throughout the world, he's the only one of whom we know to which church he belongs. Isn't that interesting? You take the champion golfers—the only ones people know which church they belong to are those that belong to the Mormon Church. The hijackers are the same. I've talked to men in industry and found that they all know when a man is a Mormon because of our high standards, and they expect us to live the standards the way we profess to do.

There is another story which I have told many times. It means so much to me, and that's the reason I repeat it, even at the cost of being criticized by my wife. When I was in the government I was called to speak to a large group of oilmen in Dallas, Texas. While introducing me, Governor Gester of Texas said, "A government is fortunate to have a man like Mr. Tanner in the government." I looked over at him and said to myself, "What can I do for you, Mr. Governor?"

After I'd finished speaking, he stood up again and said, "As I introduced the Honorable Mr. Tanner, I said that the government was fortunate to have such a man in the government. I'll tell you why I said it. As I introduced him, I also said that he had been a bishop in the Mormon Church and was now president of the Edmonton Branch. I'd like to say to you men that any man who is worthy to be a bishop in that church needs no other introduction as far as I'm concerned." He wasn't complimenting me; he was complimenting those people that he knew who were bishops and held office in the Mormon Church. I thought at the time what a great thing it would be if all our people lived so as to merit that kind of introduction.

I'm glad to see this group of missionaries here at the Language Training Mission tonight—the only thing I envy them is their white shirts while I have to wear a coat. What a tremendous thing it would be for all the returned missionaries to live so that any one of them could go, if he were looking for employment, and say, "I'm an LDS returned missionary in good standing," and have an employer say, "That's all the character introduction I need." That could be true throughout the Church. If everybody would live his religion, it wouldn't be long until everybody would be prepared to say, "If he's a Mormon in good standing, that's all the character introduction I need." Why don't we do it? Why don't we live that way every day?

You young people now are helping to determine how the Church is recognized and acknowledged throughout the world. When we were in South Africa just a week or so ago, in every audience I asked all those who had been baptized as adults to stand, and in nearly every case the majority of them were baptized as adults, and they bore testimony of how happy they were that they heard the true gospel of Jesus Christ and were able to accept it and become members of his Church and kingdom here upon the earth, and how blessed

they were in their families as a result of doing what they had done and living according to the teachings of the gospel.

### **Live in the "Watchtower" of the Church**

Let us determine in our lives to try to live in the garret or the watchtower, not in the basement; to live as spirit children of God, not as animals; to keep ourselves morally clean, accepting the teachings of Jesus Christ. Let us stand ourselves up and ask these questions: What do I really want out of life? Do I want to be happy? And I want to assure you that there is no happiness in sin. Do I want to be successful? Do I want to be loved and accepted? Do I believe and accept the teachings of Jesus Christ as given in the restored church? Do I value my membership in the Church? And then ask yourselves, "What would I do if it were taken from me today?" It breaks my heart every time reports come in that someone has sinned morally and we find it necessary to take his membership in the Church from him.

Ask also: Would I choose myself as a leader, as one that I'd like to associate with in business, one I'd like to have for my doctor? Would the Lord choose me for *any* position? Am I preparing myself for acceptance and advancement in any field, in or out of the Church? Will I have earned my passport to eternal life? Am I one in whom everyone can have complete confidence?

The greatest punishment I ever had was when my father said to me one day, "My son, I thought I could depend on you." I had failed to do something he had advised me to do. I loved my dad, and I knew he loved me. For him to say, "I thought I could depend on you," just broke my heart. I determined right then that never again would my father have reason to say, "I thought I could depend on you." When I went to bed that night I prayed to the Lord that I could so live that he would never have reason to say, "There's a holder of the priesthood, a



member of my Church, on whom I thought I could depend and can't."

Brother's and sisters, if you can't be depended upon by your associates, by your professors, by the President of the University, by those who are associating with you in any way, you are preparing yourselves for failure, not for success; not to enjoy the blessings of our Heavenly Father, but to be unhappy as you go forward in your work. Ask yourself if you are worthy of the blessings which the gospel offers.

Now these questions, my brothers and sisters, are questions that I feel we should ask ourselves regularly. Never be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Live so that you can enjoy that sweet spirit of facing the world and facing anybody with the knowledge and understanding that you are living as you should. Again, I repeat, there is no happiness in sin. If you do what is right, the Lord will bless you accordingly. You'll be loved and respected, you'll be more successful, you'll be happier as you go through life, and at the same time you'll be preparing yourselves for exaltation and eternal life.

So answer the question again: "Am I honest, honorable, true, chaste—emphasize that word *chaste*—benevolent, and in every way dependable?" Now is the time to repent, if there are any of us who need repenting—I do every day. Some need it, it seems, more than others, or

need to repent of more things than others do, but now is the time to repent. If any of you are doing things that you shouldn't be doing, go to the Lord and ask forgiveness, go to the ones presiding over you, ask forgiveness, and clear your life so that you might enjoy confidence. You who are not married, prepare yourselves to be the kind of parents you want your children to have, so that they can look up to you at all times.

I want you to know, my brothers and sisters, that I love you, that the President of the Church loves you, that all the General Authorities and those who are called to preside over you love you. Sometimes when they criticize you, sometimes when they preach to you and try to direct your activities, remember it's because they love you. They want you to be happy, they want you to succeed, and they want you to know that the Lord stands ready to answer your prayers.

Now, it's my privilege and pleasure to be with you tonight. If I have in any way assisted any of you to make up your minds to be the kind of people the Lord would like as his children I am very happy. I leave my blessing with you, and I humbly pray that the Spirit of the Lord will attend you, that you will have the courage and strength, desire and determination to be honest, honorable, true, chaste, benevolent, and strive to be worthy of eternal life, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.