

Things We Should Do

N. ELDON TANNER

As I was getting up to address you, Sister Tanner said, "You have a large audience tonight. Be sure you speak loudly enough." This reminded me of President McKay when he was standing before an audience. Someone in the back said, "Speak up. We can't hear you." Someone near the stand said, "Sit down and be glad you can't." So you take your choice.

As I saw my family here, I realized I had my own cheering section. I'll signal to them when I want them to cheer.

It's near enough to Christmastime that I am reminded of two little stories I would like to tell you. While our youngest daughter was in school, she came home just before Christmas and said to her mother, "Do you know what they tell me at school?" Her mother said no, and my daughter said, "Well, those kids tell me there's no Santa Claus."

My wife said, "What did they say about the presents?"

"They say their fathers and mothers give them to them."

"What did you say?"

"Well, you don't know *my* dad and mother."

I was thinking about a little girl whose mother was telling her about Christmas, and how Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem

to pay their taxes, and because there was no place for them to stay, the babe was born in a stable. The little girl said, "Why didn't they stay with their grandmother?" It made me wonder why we hadn't heard more about the grandmother of Jesus.

Preparation for Obtaining Eternal Life

My beloved young brethren and sisters, it is a most inspiring sight to look into the faces of this vast audience of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who understand and know that they are spirit children of God, and whose greatest desire and determination is to prepare themselves to go back into his presence. This is a tremendous goal, and to think that you have most of your lives to prepare for it! Don't waste it.

As I stand before you this evening I humbly pray that the Spirit and blessings of the Lord will attend us, each and everyone of us, that we may communicate with one another and be benefited thereby.

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 5 December 1976.

As I was looking through my notes and copies of talks I have given here, I was reminded of the fact that I talked at one of your devotional services ten years ago. It was most interesting to me to review the conditions then and compare them with the conditions now as they pertain to the growth and development of the Church and Brigham Young University. In that talk, I, as a counselor to President David O. McKay, who was then President of the Church, referred to the message which he had asked me to take to the members of the Church wherever I went. It was: "Remind those people to remember who they are and to act accordingly, and to take an individual responsibility." This is a great message.

Since then we have had three other Presidents of the Church, each one with his own distinctive message. President Joseph Fielding Smith's message was: "We are living in the Saturday evening of time, and it is our responsibility to prepare ourselves and help prepare the world for the second coming of Christ."

Next, President Harold B. Lee said his greatest message to the Church and the world was: "Keep the commandments"—just three simple words. Now President Spencer W. Kimball practices and preaches: "We should lengthen our stride and do all we can to take the gospel message to all the world—every nation, kindred, tongue, and people."

If the members of the Church would accept and put into practice these four messages, they as individuals would be greatly blessed, the growth and progress of the Church would be phenomenal, and its influence on the world would be tremendous.

Ten Years of Growth in the Church

Much growth and progress has taken place in the Church during these past ten years. The Church membership has grown from 2.5 million to over 3.5 million. We had thirteen thousand full-time missionaries then, and today

we have twenty-five thousand. To envision this, just imagine this great auditorium filled to capacity, and you will realize how many missionaries are laboring to bring the blessings of the gospel to the world.

Many of these are local full-time missionaries working in their own homelands. Where we had practically none ten years ago in any area, we now have in the South America East Area 400 local full-time missionaries. In the Hawaii Pacific Islands Area there are 385. In the Mexico Central America Area there are 350, as well as large numbers in other areas. We had nearly 69,000 convert baptisms in 1966, while in the first nine months of this year we have had over 100,000.

In 1966 we had thirty-nine General Authorities, eleven of whom have passed on. Today we have fifty-eight General Authorities. The growth of the Church is such that we have found it necessary to divide the world outside of Canada and the United States into eleven areas, each of which is supervised by a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. Others will be established.

Then we had 69 Regional Representatives of the Twelve, and today we have 115. In another recent development the Lord has directed that the First Quorum of the Seventy should be organized and comprised of those who were Assistants to the Twelve, the First Council of Seventy, and of new members as they are called and ordained and set apart as members of the First Quorum of the Seventy. There are now thirty-nine members of the Quorum of the Seventy, of whom seven are presidents.

During this period the area conference program was introduced, and as of this date we have held ten series of area conferences in twenty-eight different countries, with attendance ranging from 1,600 to 16,000 in each session, with a total of nearly 200,000 attending from thirty-four countries throughout the world.

We have also been holding solemn assemblies in the United States and Canada for the purpose of edifying, strengthening, and encouraging the priesthood leadership of the Church in their duties and responsibilities. The three members of the First Presidency and two other General Authorities attend and speak at these solemn assemblies. To date we have held thirty meetings in twenty-five cities in the United States and Canada, with a total attendance of just over thirty thousand.

The leaders of the stakes and missions within a radius of two or three hundred miles of each meeting place are invited to attend these solemn assemblies. It is certainly encouraging and most inspiring for us to meet with these groups of dedicated stake and mission leaders. We have had as many as twenty-two hundred in attendance at one meeting. Just last month we held a solemn assembly in Tallahassee, Florida, on Friday evening, and in New York City on Saturday afternoon.

Now, regarding the University. In 1966 Ernest L. Wilkinson was President of Brigham Young University and was responsible for much of the growth and maintaining the high standards of the school. Today President Dallin Oaks is leading this University to even greater heights, and, it is continuing to make its influence felt in the academic world, where it is held in high regard. During this ten-year period the faculty and the students have contributed much in business, industry, and community life. Many are holding responsible positions in industry, business, professions, and in community and government offices.

As I was thinking of these things I realized that even an old man like me experiences some changes in ten years. During that time twelve of our grandchildren have married and have given us twelve great-grandchildren.

I wish to emphasize that in ten years *you* will be ten years older. (Sometime you ought to stop and think about that.) Many changes

will occur in your lives. Many of you will be parents. Many of you will be holding leading positions in your communities, in the Church, and in governments.

Preparation for Spiritual Success in a Material World

Just about a year ago I spoke to the twelve-stake fireside here in this same building and talked about "Some Things to Ponder." Tonight I hope it will be possible for me to discuss with you "Things We Should Do" if we want to be more successful and happy as we go through life, trying to be of service and preparing ourselves for eternal life.

Many students have asked themselves, and some have asked General Authorities and others, "How can a person live the teachings of the gospel and maintain its standards, and yet be totally successful while living in this cold, materialistic, competitive world?" Also many missionaries, as they have finished their missions, have asked me what vocation they should follow.

I have given both groups the same answer: "It matters little what vocation you choose, but choose one in which you think you will be happy. Then set about to be the best you can in your chosen vocation. But wherever you are, whatever you do, remember that the Lord has said: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you' (Matthew 6:33). Also remember the admonition of Paul: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth' (Romans 1:16)."

I should like to say that I have never been embarrassed or felt deprived in any way in government or industry by living the standards of the Church. As I was introduced, you were told of the positions I have held, and I think I've had a great opportunity to prove this very same thing that I'm talking about. Most of my time while in government

service has been spent with nonmembers of the Church, and I have never been embarrassed in any way.

As a result of my own experience and observation I can promise you that as you follow these exhortations you will enjoy the respect of all and meet with success and happiness. One who believes and seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness will live righteously, keep the commandments of God, and be honest, honorable, upright in his dealings, and will occupy himself in the service of men and try to give the best service that is possible for him to give. If he is a doctor, he will do all he can in the interest of the health of the individual whom he serves. If he is a lawyer, he will do all he can in the interest of his client, never thinking how much money he can make or how it will inconvenience him or how much effort he must put into his service. One who chooses to be a successful nurse, secretary, schoolteacher, or salesperson will lose himself in that service and think first of the welfare of the individual whom he or she is serving. If one will do this he cannot help but succeed. His satisfied customers or his employers will praise his name, and people will make a trail to his door.

Many of the present leaders in business, industry, professions, universities, and research will be retired in a few years, and those jobs will be available to the youth who have graduated from school and prepared themselves to fill these positions. Whether a person is able to be successful in his vocation depends on what he is doing now to prepare himself.

Tremendous progress has been made in all fields of endeavor, and in education itself during the past twenty years. In fact, opportunities are there that were never there before, and great progress will continue to be made. How many of us realized ten years ago that within

three years we'd have a man on the moon? Now we have directed explorations on Mars and are moving into other areas of space.

In order to progress in any field of endeavor and keep up with the progress of the world, it is essential that we be prepared to put our best efforts into learning. It is no time for loitering. There is no use in waiting for the future in the hope that everything will turn out all right. We must determine as early in life as possible what is available, what we would like to do, and then be prepared to pay the price in study, work, and devotion. Remember:

*Heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.*

Never become discouraged if you have to work hard to reach your goal. Men who become great in any occupation have a passion for work. Anyone who wants anything badly enough will work to get it, and one really deludes himself if he thinks he can gain success without doing what he can to deserve it. Top positions are not held by lazy people. In fact, the future belongs to those who plan where they are going, who prepare themselves for the journey, perform their tasks skillfully, seize their opportunities, and persist in spite of setbacks. There is very little difference in the effort needed to make you what you could have been and what you are, and your effort determines the extent of your success.

We should not become so completely engrossed in work that we neglect our family. We should let them know that we love them and be where we should be when they need us. Also, remember that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Take time for diversion and recreation, but don't forget your goal.

Free Agency in Our Country and Church

We are fortunate to live in a land where we can do these things. I cannot emphasize too strongly how much we should appreciate what a great blessing it is to live in a land of freedom, where the standards of living are higher, the opportunities are greater, and where we can freely choose our lives and what we will be. In many countries in the world neither youth nor adults are free to make their choices, and I wonder—yes, I seriously wonder—if we really begin to appreciate the great privilege and blessing it is to live in a free country.

May we always remember that many men have given their lives to make it possible for us to enjoy this freedom. It is our responsibility to do all in our power to preserve it and make it available to those who succeed us.

The importance of freedom is emphasized by the fact that God's greatest gift to man is free agency, which affords us the opportunity to choose between good and evil, virtue and vice, life and death. The prime purpose of our mortal existence is to prove ourselves through the exercise of this great gift. Winston Churchill, one of the greatest leaders of this generation, once said: "I have seen many things happen, but the fact remains that human life is presented to us as a simple choice between right and wrong."

It is most important that we choose at an early age just what we want out of life, what we want to accomplish, what we want to be, the kind of community in which we wish to live, the kind of parents we want to be, the kind of families we want to have, and whether or not we choose to serve God and keep his commandments. It is your responsibility to make your own choices. The power of choice is yours; the roads are clearly marked—one offering an animal existence, and the other life abundant. Successful people in life have one thing in common: they decide what it is that they want and stay with it until they get it. It is just about as simple as that.

Another important fact for us to remember is that we are fortunate to belong to a church where this principle of free agency is understood and taught; and to attend this University, where the teachers know this and realize that you are children of God and that the soul of man is great in the sight of the Lord, and where you are encouraged to make your proper choices and to live an honest, honorable, and righteous life.

Humility

Though we know that we have the gospel in its fulness, and that we belong to the church of Jesus Christ, and that this is the greatest University in the world because it is directed under the influence of the gospel, we must never adopt a "holier than thou" attitude or give the impression that we are perfect, that we are better than others, that we need not repent, that we have arrived, or that we are saved. Everyone of us needs to repent of things that we have failed to do, or things that we should have done, and things we have done that are wrong, and concentrate on trying to improve ourselves and live more closely and completely the teachings of the gospel. Where members of the Church adopt a smug or self-satisfied or superior attitude, we deserve the criticism we receive, and we often turn away prospective converts.

Let us be what the Lord expects us to be and live as he expects us to live, remembering that he has said the first great commandment is to love him with all our hearts, minds, and souls, and the second is to love our neighbors as ourselves. As we do this we will not be inclined to criticize or gossip or carry false tales about our friends, associates, classmates, or neighbors, but will look for the good in them and hand out bouquets instead of bricks. We must be tolerant and not find fault because others do not see or live as we think they should.

When we feel like criticizing or finding fault with others, we would do well to stand before a mirror and look that image straight in the eye and tell him or her where and how he or she can improve. We have a full-time job trying to improve and prepare ourselves for a full and successful life.

Christ gave us a parable about this, which we read from Luke:

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. [Luke 18:9–14]

Education of the Whole Man at BYU

These are some of the lessons you should be learning here along with your academic studies. You are learning how to build the whole man—mental, physical, and spiritual. Most schools and universities do not concern themselves about the spiritual side of life, and therefore their students fail to obtain the most essential knowledge of all—how to prepare for eternal life.

While speaking last April to the graduating class of this great University, Dr. John A. Howard, president of Rockford College in Rockford, Illinois, referred to the problems and sacrifices made by our early pioneers

who crossed the plains to the Great Salt Lake Valley. (I repeated this in the general priesthood meeting last October.) Then he said:

The work that faces your generation is no less arduous. The deserts you must bring to blossom are no less arid, but your mission may demand even more of you, for unlike the early pioneers of this state you are confronted by a wilderness which is subtle and fluid and elusive. Indeed the wilderness which you must conquer is disguised as a civilization so that there is the double necessity to unmask the deceit, to distinguish between what is authentic and what is counterfeit, and to labor to support the one and oppose the other.

The moral depravity which appears on television is rivaled by the moral tone of campuses where cohabitation is commonplace and where the use of illegal drugs doesn't even raise an eyebrow anymore. The swelling tide of crime is matched by the deluge of dishonesty—and I think that word is adequate and accurate. The tide of crime is matched by the deluge of dishonesty on the part of politicians who promise what they know they cannot deliver and who try to deceive the people into believing that projects can always be paid for out of somebody else's pocket.

It may be difficult for your generation to conceive what this society was like a scant ten years ago. Gutter language was almost unknown on public platform and in plays and movies. Coeducational dormitories were unthinkable anywhere in this country. . . . Salacious literature was not publicly available on the newsstands . . . nor. . . in the bookstores.

He then gave this challenge:

I believe there is no single large group of your generation in the United States as consistently trained in its religious obligations, as ready to work long hours and make sacrifices for its principles, and as well versed in the dignity of self-reliance as you are. If that estimate is correct, you are greatly blessed and highly privileged.

This is a great compliment to Brigham Young University and to those who attend it. Remember, this is given by a nonmember of the Church who is president of another university and who is acquainted with the conditions in the world today and is qualified to speak on the subject. He has clearly pointed out what our responsibilities are here at BYU. These responsibilities are great. I do hope that everyone here is prepared to accept the challenge and do his part through study and by good, clean living to make this a better world in which to live.

The Word of Wisdom

If you are going to do this, you must be united in your stand against the evils of the day, about which all of you are aware. One of the most important things you can do is to live the Word of Wisdom strictly. We are all convinced of the many problems arising from the use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. How fortunate we are to have this health code as part of the gospel! Keeping your bodies and minds free from the deleterious effects of these forbidden things will aid you greatly in your climb to success, to say nothing of the spiritual effect it will have on you in your goal for eternal life. The breaking of the Word of Wisdom weakens one and often leads to other serious transgressions.

I'd like to tell you of a man that I knew well when I was in the government. He was head of one of the largest drilling companies in Canada. He began social drinking and continued until his friends were telling him he was an alcoholic and encouraging him to leave it alone. I was talking to him one day (I knew him well) after he had greater control of himself. He said, "I wouldn't believe that I was an alcoholic until I found myself in the gutter. And then I went to Alcoholics Anonymous."

I said, "Would you come and talk to my M-Men and Gleaner group?"

He said, "I'll be glad to tell anybody if I can help them."

As he talked to them, he told them how he had become an alcoholic, and then he said, "No man, no matter how well-to-do he is, can afford to take the first drink of alcohol." He was fortunate in that Alcoholics Anonymous made it possible for him to cure himself.

I want to read something here that I read in the paper the other day. I think you all know Gifford Nielsen and are aware that he is making news in papers across the country. I was interested in reading a story about him which appeared in a New York paper. It gave a description of him, told of his record in football, quoted some things that he had said, and then concluded with this comment:

Another advantage Nielsen feels he has is his religion. A Mormon in the strictest sense, Nielsen doesn't smoke or swear or drink alcoholic beverages, coffee, or tea.

"We call it 'The Word of Wisdom,'" he said. "When you play at BYU, whether you're a Mormon or non-Mormon, you have to sign your name to a list of guidelines to live by. I thoroughly stand by this, because otherwise you're hurting your body. There's no place for that in athletics."

That's the kind of courageous stand that everyone of us should take. It has been published in papers all over the country. He has brought credit to himself and to his University.

Moral Cleanliness

Also, let me remind you to keep yourselves morally clean. Ancient and modern prophets and our present President, Spencer W. Kimball, have reminded us over and over again of the importance of virtue and chastity. You know all of the reasons why you should refrain from any immoral or impure practices. Keep yourselves worthy—young men, to hold the priesthood and go on missions—and, all of you, to enjoy the blessings of the temple: a temple marriage for time and all eternity, with your children sealed to you as an eternal

family unit. Why jeopardize these great blessings? Prepare to be worthy parents so that you can raise worthy children, who will be able to follow your good example. Make up your minds while you are here what you will do and what you will not do.

I'd like to give you an experience I had some years ago when I was president of the branch in Edmonton. A couple called me early one Sunday morning and said, "We must see you, President Tanner." The boy had wanted to go on a mission, and they had planned to be married in the temple on his return. They had been planning and thinking about it for some time.

They came with tears in their eyes and sorrow in their hearts, and they told me of the experience they had had Saturday night. The girl said: "I received a letter from my father just last week. He said he was worried about me, reminded me who I am, and told me to guard my virtue. But we didn't think this temptation would ever overcome us." Then she added, "See what I have done to myself, my parents, and my family."

The young man said: "And I am responsible, and not worthy now to go on a mission."

This example should help us to understand and appreciate how important it is that we keep ourselves morally clean.

Honesty

Next, be *honest* in all you do. Be dependable in every way. Keep your name unsullied so that your posterity can point to you with pride for the heritage you have left to them. Worldly riches are not nearly so important as the value of a good name.

I remember so well when I wanted to go to normal school to prepare myself to be a schoolteacher. We were poor people. Father said, "We really need you here on the farm, and I can't possibly pay for your schooling. But if you can borrow the money, you may go, and we'll try to get along."

I went down to the bank, met with the manager, and told him why I had come. I wanted to borrow money to go to normal school. He said, "Oh, are you so-and-so Tanner's boy?"

I said, "No, I'm not. I'm N. W. Tanner's boy."

"N. W. Tanner's boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much money would you need?"

I told him.

He said, "When can you start paying it back?"

I said, "As soon as I start teaching and receive my wages."

He said, "If you're N. W. Tanner's boy, you may have the money and pay it back as you said you would."

I thought then what a tremendous thing it was for me to be the son of a man whose name was such that the bank manager would let me have the money with no security other than that name. I suppose he knew dad would pay it back if I didn't, though he didn't sign the note with me. I made up my mind then that I would so live that if my family needed my assistance my name would not be a deterrent to them in any way, but I hoped it would be helpful.

Do not be as the hypocrites whom Christ chastised so severely. Live what you profess and preach and lead others to believe you are. Be a good friend and neighbor. Be tolerant and kind, and give the best service you can to your fellowmen. In short, keep the commandments.

We have been talking about the progress that has been made in the last ten years and how we can succeed in life. As it is near the end of the year, it is a good time to take stock and ask ourselves a few questions.

Think back for just ten years and see where you were, how old you were, what you had in mind, and the progress you have made. Then take this year alone. It would be well to ask yourself these questions:

Have I accomplished all that I intended to do in 1976? If not, what progress have I made?

What have I done that has hindered me? Am I happy with the progress I have made? Is the Lord happy with the way I live and the things I have done and am doing? Where do I want to be ten years from now, or one year from now? Have I set my goals firmly? Am I determined to reach them? Is what I am doing now preparing me for those goals? Am I determined to repent where necessary? The Lord has said:

Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.

By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.
[D&C 58:42–43]

Before sitting down I should like to bear my testimony to you, referring back to these two statements: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” “[Be] not ashamed of the

gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.”

I know, as I know I stand before you young people tonight, that God is a living God, that Jesus Christ is his Son in the flesh. We had a premortal existence, and Christ came and gave his life for you and me that we might enjoy immortality and, by living the gospel, enjoy eternal life. The gospel has been restored in these latter days by God the Father himself and Jesus Christ appearing to that boy Joseph Smith, so that Christ’s church could be established here upon the earth. Jesus Christ directs the affairs of this Church today.

It has been a great privilege for me to be so closely associated with four Presidents of the Church and to counsel with them, sit at their feet, and see and know that the Lord directs his work through them. We have his prophet, Spencer W. Kimball, on earth with us today. Follow him and you cannot go astray. Remember who you are and act accordingly always, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.