

Be Not Afraid, Only Believe

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

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My beloved colleagues in the Church Educational System, thank you for this privilege to be with you. As the introduction has indicated, this is something of a coming home for me. “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,”¹ I started out on what I thought would be a lifetime career in the Church Educational System. But someone has said, “If you want to make Heavenly Father laugh, tell Him your plans.” My plans—and the only professional plans I ever had—were that I would be a CES teacher, I would never budge from a religious education classroom, and I would die with a piece of chalk in my hand. I am happy to say that I did get a few years in the classroom, but the Brethren kept exercising damage control by pulling me out. In any case, please know that I still feel I am one of you, am very proud of what you are doing for the youth and young adults of the Church, and am so grateful for the blessings Pat and I received while we were with you in CES—and I realize that I am speaking well beyond the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City tonight to a global audience. My, what this system has grown to be! Pat and I will always feel that we are “with you”—side by side with you, shoulder to shoulder—in this greatest of all causes.

In the spirit of that, may I take a moment to thank the growing number of you who have accepted callings to serve CES in so many ways and in so many parts of the world. Teachers and supervisors and administrative aides and resource people of all kinds now bless our seminaries, institutes, Church schools, and institutions of higher education. Perhaps none in that vast team deserve our awe and our appreciation more than early-morning seminary teachers. Dear friends, there is a throne in heaven for you! Year after year (decade after decade for some of you!) you prepare through the night, set the alarm for the morning, groan when it goes off, and then either drive somewhere in the dark or welcome into your living room a pajama-clad, uncombed, sleep-dazed cadre of students. What a holy work you do, and what a shield of faith you and your predecessors have given to now two-thirds of a century of early-morning seminary students. And *never* underestimate what those students are hearing and feeling, in spite of appearances. Bless you and bless them for one of the remarkable examples of devotion demonstrated in this Church—a program that unfailingly impresses leaders and parents and administrators of other faiths who know of early-morning seminary. But I digress. I thank *all* of you, wherever you may be, whatever you are doing—paid or volunteer, secondary level or college, and down into elementary school classes where we still have a few of them.

Now, indulge me for one other very important tribute. I give special thanks to the spouses who join us in this setting all over the world tonight, without whom the Church Educational System could not succeed. Sister Holland has been through a very serious illness and is still on the mend, so she is not able to be with us tonight, but perhaps that makes it all the more appropriate to pay tribute to her and all other spouses in this system. I know it is a bit clichéd to say, “I don’t know where I would be tonight without her,” but in any case that is absolutely true after more than 50 years of her guidance, her love, and her unfailing influence on me and on the crucial decisions

we have made together, including the decision to teach in the Church Educational System. I say of her what Mark Twain had his Adam say of Eve: “[Wherever] she was, *there* was [paradise].” ²

So wives—and husbands where that applies—thank you for your devotion, your sacrifice, your example, and your faith. Husbands—and wives where that applies—don’t wait until you are 74 years old, speaking to CES personnel, to thank your sweetheart for making such a blessed life possible. Be good to each other, be happy together, and be thankful for such a rewarding way to make a living.

As this assignment tonight approached, I asked Elder Paul Johnson and Brother Chad Webb to invite a few of you to submit questions or raise issues as a way to let me know what is on your minds. When comments came in I was surprised to see how often the matter of fear or anxiety or uneasiness was mentioned—mostly the fears and anxieties of students, but occasionally it was *your* uneasiness that was expressed one way or the other. So as something of a theme tonight, I have organized my remarks around an incident in the life of young Gordon B. Hinckley. You all remember it. You have probably shared it with your students.

As young Elder Hinckley came of missionary age in the depths of the 1930s’ depression, the world was in financial crisis, unemployment was raging at a devastating 35 percent, and few missionaries were going into the field. Young Gordon, who had finished his bachelor’s degree, was desperately anxious to attend graduate school and then somehow find a way to earn a living. His mother had recently passed away; his father was alone, facing the economic pressures of the day.

In the midst of these concerns, Gordon received a mission call to England—at the time the most expensive mission in the world, with no equalization plan as there is today. As he prepared to leave, with all of these emotions and such potential problems troubling him, his beloved father, Bryant S. Hinckley, quietly handed him a card on which were written just five words: “Be not afraid,” it said, “only believe.” ³

I am still not sure why that little story, told 20 years ago, has affected me so much, but it has. So, with that concise counsel from [Mark 5:36](#) as a backdrop, I ask you and your students to “be not afraid, only believe.” ⁴ With uncompromised confidence in God, I ask you to summon full confidence in yourselves and build full confidence in your students by teaching with conviction and optimism that the gospel of [Jesus Christ](#) is the most certain, the most secure, the most reliable, and the most rewarding truth on earth and in heaven, in time and in eternity. I ask you to teach that nothing—not anything, not anyone, not any influence—will keep this Church from fulfilling its mission and realizing its destiny set from before the foundation of the world. Ours is that fail-safe, inexorable, indestructible dispensation of the *fulness* of the gospel. Our youth have no need to be afraid or tentative about themselves or about their future. What they do need to do is believe and to rise up to make the most of the remarkable day in which we live.

The momentum that began in a grove of trees in upstate New York two centuries ago will *continue* to roll forth, unabated and undeniable—Daniel’s stone cut out of the mountain without hands. ⁵ That scriptural kingdom will be triumphant, and it will prevail. Unlike every other era before us, this dispensation will *not* experience an institutional apostasy; it will *not* see a loss of

priesthood keys; it will *not* suffer a cessation of revelation from the voice of Almighty God. Individuals will apostatize, they may turn a deaf ear to heaven, but *never* again will the dispensation collectively do so. What a secure thought that is! What a day in which to live! What a way to cut through fear or faintheartedness.

No wonder the Prophet Joseph taught that every prophet, priest, and king in every age “looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live; and fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations they have sung and written and prophesied of this our day; . . . we are the favored people that God has made choice of to bring about the Latter-day glory.”⁶

I love that declaration, known to every CES teacher in the audience. You have probably quoted it to your own students. I hope so. It “fires” me “with heavenly and joyful anticipations.” It also humbles me that ours is the dispensation God has favored. We are the ones to bring about this “Latter-day glory”⁷ spoken of. So much rests on our shoulders, but it will be a glorious and successful experience. If any of your students are unsettled, or if *you* are unsettled, reassure one and all that the victory in this final contest has already been declared. The victory is already in the record books—these books, the scriptures!

We know for certain that if and when everything else in the latter days is down or dying; if governments, economies, industries, and institutions crumble; if societies and cultures become a quagmire of chaos and insecurity, nevertheless, through it all the gospel of Jesus Christ and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that bears that gospel to the world will stand triumphant. It will stand undefiled in God’s hand until the very Son of God Himself comes to rule and reign as Lord of lords and King of kings. Nothing is more certain in this world. Nothing is more sure. Nothing could be more of an antidote to anxiety. As the Prophet Joseph declared, and as a generation of missionaries quote with fervor: The truth of God will sweep every country and sound in every ear. No unhallowed hand can stop it from progressing.⁸ Still true.

As a preface to the revelations of our day, the Lord said unequivocally:

“These commandments . . . are true and faithful, and *the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled* .

“What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and *though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled* . . .

“For behold, and lo, the Lord is God, . . . and the truth abideth forever and ever.”⁹

And if there are some bumps along the way while waiting to see every promise kept and every prophecy fulfilled, so be it. As the remarkable Eliza R. Snow penned:

What, tho, if the favor of Ahman possessing,

This world’s bitter hate you are called to endure?

The angels are waiting to crown you with blessings!

Go forward, be faithful, the promise is sure.

Go forward, be faithful, the promise is sure. [10](#)

That spirit cuts through confusion like the two-edged sword the truth of the Lord always is. [11](#)

So, if you haven't noticed, I am bullish on the latter-days. In nothing could I have more faith than I have in God the Eternal Father; in Jesus Christ, His Son; in their redeeming gospel; and in their divinely guided Church. So, what do we owe our students in this? We owe them a comparable testimony and a life "of good cheer." [12](#) The Savior asked for that so often that I personally consider it a commandment. However, worry and fear and pessimism and fretting can destroy anyone's good cheer—yours and that of the people around you. So put a smile on your face, and cherish every day of your life! Consider this from that young, fearful missionary, now speaking from the vantage point of many, many more years of experience:

President Gordon B. Hinckley: "Let us not be afraid. Jesus is our leader, our strength, and our king.

"This is an age of pessimism. Ours is a mission of faith. To my brethren and sisters everywhere, I call upon you to reaffirm your faith, to move this work forward across the world. You can make it stronger by the manner in which you live. Let the gospel be your sword and your shield. Each of us is a part of the greatest cause on earth." [13](#)

"What do we hear in the gospel which we have received?" the Prophet Joseph asked. And then he answered it: "[We hear] a voice of gladness! ... glad tidings of good things. ...

"... Let your hearts rejoice," he said, "and be exceedingly glad." [14](#)

Let me list some specific things that I think you should teach your students to be glad about and over which they should cease being fearful. I note, for example, getting married, having families, and welcoming children into the world. We in the presiding councils of the Church hear far too often—and perhaps you do as well—that many of our youth and young adults are terrified to get married. In extreme cases they are fearful that the world is about to end in blood and disaster—something they don't want to take a spouse or child into. In less severe, more common cases, they are fearful that the world will just get more difficult, that jobs will be too hard to find, and that one should be out of school, out of debt, have a career, and own a home before considering marriage.

Good grief! On that formula Sister Holland and I still wouldn't be married! Seriously, when we got married we were both still undergraduates at BYU, with neither set of parents able to help us at all financially, no way to imagine all the graduate education we had yet ahead of us, and this with \$300 dollars between us on our wedding day! Now that may not be the ideal way to start a marriage, but what a marriage it has been and what we would have missed if we had waited even one day longer than we did once we knew that that marriage was right. Sure, there was sacrifice; certainly there were restless days and weeks and months; certainly there was some burning of the midnight oil. But I tremble to think what we would have lost if we had taken "counsel from our

fears,” ¹⁵ as President James E. Faust would later tell me over and over and over that I and no one else should ever do. What if we had delayed inordinately? What would we have missed?

I still think the best definition of marital love is James Thurber’s, who said simply that love is what you go through together. ¹⁶ I will be eternally grateful for what Pat was willing to go through with me—that she did not feel I had to have my degree and a car and a home and a career all in hand before we could marry.

And we wanted children as soon as we could get them, which in our case did not turn out to be as easy as we thought. In fact, if we hadn’t determined to have our [family](#) as promptly as we could, we might well have been a childless couple, as some of our friends and some of you, through no fault of your own, have found it your lot in life to be. It took us three years to have our first child, another three to get a second, and four to get a third. And then that was it. A full-term miscarriage for a fourth closed that door to us forever, so we have rejoiced in the three children we have been able to raise. But what would our lives have been like if we had waited or delayed or worried unduly about the economics of it all? Which of our children would we give back? With what memories or love or lessons with each of them would we ever part? I shudder to think of it.

Brethren and sisters, I think we have to start earlier to teach our students the place of marriage and family in the great plan of happiness. Waiting until they are of marriageable age puts us way behind the curve. And I don’t have to tell you that social trends, declining moral standards, and the “vain imagination” ¹⁷ of popular entertainment will regularly be in opposition to that teaching.

For example, it is alarming to us that in the last 50 years the natural median age for men to marry has risen from age 22 to age 28! That is the world’s figure, not the Church’s, but we eventually follow the world in some way in much of its social trending. Add to this such diverse influences on the young as the increased availability of birth control, the morally destructive rise of [pornography](#), an increased disaffiliation with institutional religion, the pervasive quest for material goods generally, the rise of postmodern thought with its skepticism and subjectivity and you see the context for anxiety and fear that a rising generation can feel. With these kinds of winds blowing in their lives, they can be damaged almost before mature, married life has begun.

Furthermore, so many young people I talk to fear that if they do marry they will be just another divorce statistic; they will be another individual who dove foolishly into marriage only to find there was no water in that pool. Couple that leering about the success of marriage with the tawdry, foul, often devilish mocking of chastity and fidelity and family life so regularly portrayed in movies and on television and you see the problem.

We have our work cut out for us to preserve and perpetuate both the holiness and the happiness of marriage. *You can begin by showing the blessing, the reward, and the reality of a happy marriage in your own lives.* That doesn’t mean you should be Pollyannaish about marriage; every marriage takes work, and yours will too. But, as always, your first and most penetrating lessons to your students will be the lessons of your own life. You show them in word and deed that your marriage and your family mean everything to you because they should—they must.

Help your students “be not afraid, only believe” ¹⁸ in marriage and family in these last days. Lucifer will make that harder and harder to do even as it becomes more and more important to do.

A number of you commented about other troubling contemporary issues—issues that bring other kinds of fear, challenging the belief of our youth in sometimes aggressive ways. One of you phrased it this way: “It is getting harder and harder to teach the doctrine of the Church without offending students who have become overly tolerant of the world’s view. How do we stay true to the doctrine without offending our students?”

First of all I would say that offense is more likely to come in *how* we present the doctrine rather than in the doctrine itself. Our doctrine is not new; it isn’t as if the students don’t know exactly what our position is going to be on virtually every trendy transgression that comes along. So, what a skillful and sensitive teacher or leader or parent has to do is make sure our determination to be *righteous* doesn’t come across as being *self-righteous* because our students will be quick to perceive the difference. That is why I say our manner, our method, our attitude and compassion will, once they are understood by our students, allow us to be as direct and as firm as we must be in proclaiming the commandments of God.

Furthermore, I would ask you never to hesitate to teach true doctrine simply because you are afraid it might offend someone. As section 50 of the [Doctrine and Covenants](#) declares, if we teach the truth by the Spirit and the students receive the truth by the Spirit, “he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.” ¹⁹

In such an exchange you may have heard students say what I have heard them say, something like, “I know how we are supposed to live, but do we have to impose that standard or that behavior or those beliefs on everybody else?” And of course the answer to that is, “No. We do not *impose* standards or behavior or beliefs on anyone.” But this Church, and we as CES teachers in it, are under covenant to teach standards of behavior, to mark the sure path, to identify the safe course, to raise an ensign of truth to the nations.

Every teacher in this audience remembers the legendary story of Brother Karl G. Maeser taking a group of missionaries across the Alps by following a homely set of sticks positioned at crucial points on the path, marking the safe way of passage. The sticks weren’t much to look at—all of them irregularly shaped, some weathered and worn, none of them anything to write home about—but their placement, the course they marked, and the silent message their very presence communicated was the difference between life and death. Brother Maeser’s lesson that day was that these sticks were like the presiding Brethren of the Church—some tall, some short, a pretty homely bunch in a beauty contest—but following their path was to follow the path of safety. ²⁰ My point with you tonight is that this is what true doctrine (which is what the Brethren teach) does for us all day, every day. *Someone* has to plant those doctrinal guide posts. *Someone* has to say, “Here is the truth, and here is safety.” *Someone* has to guide the way of those who are traveling narrow, often dangerous paths, perhaps for the first time, as many of our high school- and college-age students will be doing. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, you are very prominent among the “someones” God has asked to mark the path of salvation.

So, we must skillfully, compassionately share with an individual student, or with society, that course of safety, that sometimes narrow trail of truth, that firm foundation and sure footing upon which if they stand they cannot fall. And a student cannot stand on such sure ground if he or she does not know where it is, and they cannot know where it is unless parents and leaders and teachers like you lead them to it and walk that way with them.

A firm foundation? The sure way? “It is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God” ²¹ that every one of us, young or old alike, must build. Why? To what end? “That when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you [and your students and your society and your own hopes and dreams, he, the devil], shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.” ²²

That strength, brothers and sisters, undergirds our position on every question of doctrine, history, or Church practice that can and often does arise as the work unfolds. You have heard those questions. They are not new. They first arose in the neighborhood of Palmyra when the 14-year-old Joseph first reported his heavenly vision, and they continue in one form or another to the present day. We have recently addressed a dozen or so of these issues in a series of essays, desiring to be both accurate and transparent within the framework of faith. Not all gospel questions have answers—yet—but they will come.

In the meantime, I have a question. What conceivable historical or doctrinal or procedural issue that may arise among any group could ever overshadow or negate one’s consuming spiritual conviction regarding the Father’s merciful plan of salvation; His Only Begotten Son’s birth, mission, Atonement, and [Resurrection](#); the reality of the First Vision; the restoration of the priesthood; the receipt of divine revelation, both personally and institutionally; the soul-shaping spirit and moving power of the [Book of Mormon](#); the awe and majesty of the temple endowment; one’s own personal experience with true miracles; and on and on and on? Talk about a question! It is a mystery to me how those majestic, eternal, first-level truths so central to the grandeur of the *whole* gospel message can be set aside or completely dismissed by some in favor of obsessing over second- or third- or fourth-level pieces of that whole. To me, this is, in words attributed to Edith Wharton, truly being trapped in “the thick of thin things.”

I readily acknowledge the very legitimate inquiries of many who are perfectly honest in heart. I also readily acknowledge that *everyone* has some gospel question or other yet to be answered. Nevertheless, we would hope, for skeptic, believer, and everyone in between, that humility, faith, and the influence of the Holy Spirit would always be elements of *every* quest for truth, that foundational truths would *always* be the reference points in that quest, and that all other issues which may yet need resolving are pursued “by study and also by faith.” ²³ At the end of the day, all of us must make distinctions between the greater and the lesser elements of our testimony. For me the greater pillars include those majestic truths mentioned earlier, their irreplaceable centrality in my life, and the realization that I simply could not live, I could not go on without them or without the blessings I have known or without the promises we have all been given in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

So, as we speak of questions, write this one from the Apostle Paul across the chalkboard of your mind and instill it in the hearts of your students: “For what if some [do] not believe? [What if they don’t?] shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” ²⁴ The answer to that is “No!” Not in my life! Not in my lifetime! Not for me and my house! *No one’s* unbelief has or can or will—ever—make my faith in God, my love of Christ, my devotion to this Church and this latter-day work “without effect.” The truthfulness of this latter-day gospel is “in effect,” and it will stay “in effect” as long as the sun shines and rivers run to the sea, and forever after that. Don’t miss those blessings!

In so saying, I add again the witness of that young college-aged institute student who we have been quoting, who grew up to be the President of the Church. That will be followed by the testimony of his marvelous successor, our own beloved President Thomas S. Monson.

President Gordon B. Hinckley: “God is at the helm. Never doubt it. When we are confronted with opposition, He will open the way when there appears to be no way. ...

“Let not any voices of discontent disturb you. Let not the critics worry you. As Alma declared long ago: ‘Trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments’ (Mosiah 23:14).

“The truth is in this Church. ... As the Psalmist declared: ‘Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep’ (Ps. 121:4).

“He who is our Savior slumbers not nor sleeps as He watches over this His kingdom.” ²⁵

President Thomas S. Monson: “I testify to you that our promised blessings are beyond measure. Though the storm clouds may gather, though the rains may pour down upon us, our knowledge of the gospel and our love of our Heavenly Father and of our Savior will comfort and sustain us and bring joy to our hearts as we walk uprightly and keep the commandments. There will be nothing in this world that can defeat us.

“My beloved brothers and sisters, fear not. Be of good cheer. The future is as bright as your faith.” ²⁶

With conviction in my heart and eternal [gratitude](#) in my soul for the truthfulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, may I close with my own echo of the counsel God has given us more than 100 times in the scriptures—to be not afraid; to be of good cheer. That is my message to you and the message I ask you to convey to your students.

“[Behold,] ye are little children, and ye have not ... yet understood how great blessings the Father hath ... prepared for you.” ²⁷

“Fear not, ... for you are mine, and I have overcome the world, and you are of them that my Father hath given me.” ²⁸

“Ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours.” [29](#)

“Wherefore, I am in your midst, . . . I am the good shepherd, and the stone of Israel. He that buildeth upon this rock shall never fall.

“And the day cometh that you shall hear my voice and see me, and know that I am.” [30](#)

That blessing uttered by the Savior of the world I reiterate tonight and pronounce on each of you as if my hands were upon your head. As God is my witness regarding the divinity of this work, so am I His witness of it. This is the truth. In this Church, you and I are engaged in the redeeming, hastening work of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The doctrine is here, the ordinances are here, the revelations are here, the future is here. It is the only sure, safe path for the children of God to follow, including His CES teachers and their students. I delight in the privilege of moving forward side by side with you on such sure, certain, sacred ground. “Be not afraid, only believe.” [31](#) In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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Notes

1. “A New Hope,” *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*, directed by George Lucas (1977; Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox Video, 2004), DVD.
2. Mark Twain, *The Diaries of Adam and Eve* (2000), 199.
3. [Mark 5:36](#).
4. [Mark 5:36](#).
5. See [Daniel 2:45](#).
6. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 186.
7. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 186.
8. See *History of the Church*, 4:540.
9. [Doctrine and Covenants 1:37–39](#); emphasis added.
10. “The Time Is Far Spent,” *Hymns*, no. 266.
11. See [Hebrews 4:12](#) and [Doctrine and Covenants 6:2](#).
12. [Matthew 14:27](#).
13. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Stay the Course—Keep the Faith,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 72.
14. [Doctrine and Covenants 128:19, 22](#).
15. James E. Faust, “Be Not Afraid,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2002, 6.
16. See James Thurber, in “Thurber,” *Life*, Mar. 14, 1960, 108.
17. [1 Nephi 12:18](#).
18. [Mark 5:36](#).
19. [Doctrine and Covenants 50:22](#).
20. See Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* (1953), 22.
21. [Helaman 5:12](#).
22. [Helaman 5:12](#).
23. [Doctrine and Covenants 88:118](#).

24. [Romans 3:3](#).
25. Gordon B. Hinckley, “God Is at the Helm,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 59–60.
26. Thomas S. Monson, “Be of Good Cheer,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2009, 92.
27. [Doctrine and Covenants 78:17](#).
28. [Doctrine and Covenants 50:41](#).
29. [Doctrine and Covenants 78:18](#).
30. [Doctrine and Covenants 50:44–45](#).
31. [Mark 5:36](#).