

Be Strong and of a Good Courage

President Thomas S. Monson CR April 2014

My beloved brethren, how good it is to be with you once again. I pray for heavenly help as I respond to the opportunity to address you.

Beyond this Conference Center are additional thousands assembled in chapels and in other settings throughout much of the world. A common thread binds all of us together, for we have been entrusted to bear the priesthood of God.

We are here upon the earth at a remarkable period in its history. Our opportunities are almost limitless, and yet we also face a multitude of challenges, some of them unique to our time.

We live in a world where moral values have, in great measure, been tossed aside, where sin is flagrantly on display, and where temptations to stray from the strait and narrow path surround us. We are faced with persistent pressures and insidious influences tearing down what is decent and attempting to substitute the shallow philosophies and practices of a secular society.

Because of these and other challenges, decisions are constantly before us which can determine our destiny. In order for us to make the correct decisions, courage is needed—the courage to say no when we should, the courage to say yes when that is appropriate, the courage to do the right thing because it is right.

Inasmuch as the trend in society today is rapidly moving away from the values and principles the Lord has given us, we will almost certainly be called upon to defend that which we believe. Will we have the courage to do so?

Said President J. Reuben Clark Jr., who for many years was a member of the First Presidency: “Not unknown are cases where [those] of presumed faith ... have felt that, since by affirming their full faith they might call down upon themselves the ridicule of their unbelieving colleagues, they must either modify or explain away their faith, or destructively dilute it, or even pretend to cast it away. Such are hypocrites.”¹ None of us would wish to wear such a label, and yet are we reluctant to declare our faith in some circumstances?

We can help ourselves in our desire to do what is right if we put ourselves in places and participate in activities where our thoughts are influenced for good and where the Spirit of the Lord will be comfortable.

I recall reading some time ago the counsel a father gave to his son when he went away to school: “If you ever find yourself where you shouldn’t ought to be, get out!” I offer to each of you the same advice: “If you ever find yourself where you shouldn’t ought to be, get out!”

The call for courage comes constantly to each of us. Every day of our lives courage is needed—not just for the momentous events but more often as we make decisions or respond to circumstances around us. Said Scottish poet and novelist Robert Louis Stevenson: “Everyday

courage has few witnesses. But yours is no less noble because no drum beats for you and no crowds shout your name.”²

Courage comes in many forms. Wrote the Christian author Charles Swindoll: “Courage is not limited to the battlefield ... or bravely catching a thief in your house. The real tests of courage are much quieter. They are inner tests, like remaining faithful when no one’s looking, ... like standing alone when you’re misunderstood.”³ I would add that this inner courage also includes doing the right thing even though we may be afraid, defending our beliefs at the risk of being ridiculed, and maintaining those beliefs even when threatened with a loss of friends or of social status. He who stands steadfastly for that which is right must risk becoming at times disapproved and unpopular.

While serving in the United States Navy in World War II, I learned of brave deeds, instances of valor, and examples of courage. One which I shall never forget was the quiet courage of an 18-year-old seaman—not of our faith—who was not too proud to pray. Of 250 men in the company, he was the only one who each night knelt down by the side of his bunk, at times amidst the jeers of bullies and the jests of unbelievers. With bowed head, he prayed to God. He never wavered. He never faltered. He had courage.

I listened not long ago to an example of one who surely seemed to lack this inner courage. A friend told of a spiritual and faith-promoting sacrament meeting she and her husband had attended in their ward. A young man who held the office of priest in the Aaronic Priesthood touched the hearts of the entire congregation as he spoke of gospel truths and of the joys of keeping the commandments. He bore a fervent, touching testimony as he stood at the pulpit, appearing clean and neat in his white shirt and tie.

Later that same day, as this woman and her husband drove out of their neighborhood, they saw this same young man who had so inspired them just a few hours earlier. Now, however, he presented a completely different picture as he walked down the sidewalk dressed in scruffy clothes—and smoking a cigarette. My friend and her husband were not only greatly disappointed and saddened, but they were also confused by how he could so convincingly seem to be one person in sacrament meeting and then so quickly seem to be someone else entirely.

Brethren, are you the same person wherever you are and whatever you are doing—the person our Heavenly Father wants you to be and the person you know you should be?

In an interview published in a national magazine, well-known American NCAA basketball player Jabari Parker, a member of the Church, was asked to share the best advice he had received from his father. Replied Jabari, “[My father] said, Just be the same person you are in the dark that you are in the light.”⁴ Important advice, brethren, for all of us.

Our scriptures are filled with examples of the type of courage needed by each of us today. The prophet Daniel exhibited supreme courage by standing up for that which he knew to be right and by demonstrating the courage to pray, though threatened with death were he to do so.⁵

Courage characterized the life of Abinadi, as shown by his willingness to offer his life rather than to deny the truth.⁶

Who can help but be inspired by the lives of the 2,000 stripling sons of Helaman, who taught and demonstrated the need for courage to follow the teachings of parents, to be chaste and pure?⁷

Perhaps each of these scriptural accounts is crowned by the example of Moroni, who had the courage to persevere in righteousness to the very end.⁸

Throughout his life, the Prophet Joseph Smith provided countless examples of courage. One of the most dramatic occurred as he and other brethren were chained together—imagine, chained together—and held in an unfinished cabin next to the courthouse in Richmond, Missouri. Parley P. Pratt, who was among those held captive, wrote of one particular night: “We had lain as if in sleep till the hour of midnight had passed, and our ears and hearts had been pained, while we had listened for hours to the obscene jests, the horrid oaths, the dreadful blasphemies and filthy language of our guards.”

Continued Elder Pratt:

“I had listened till I became so disgusted, shocked, horrified, and so filled with the spirit of indignant justice that I could scarcely refrain from rising upon my feet and rebuking the guards; but [I] had said nothing to Joseph, or any one else, although I lay next to him and knew he was awake. On a sudden he arose to his feet, and spoke in a voice of thunder, or as the roaring lion, uttering, as near as I can recollect, the following words:

“SILENCE. ... In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you, and command you to be still; I will not live another minute and hear such language. Cease such talk, or you or I die THIS INSTANT!”

Joseph “stood erect in terrible majesty,” as described by Elder Pratt. He was chained, without a weapon, and yet he was calm and dignified. He looked down upon the quailing guards, who were shrinking into a corner or crouching at his feet. These seemingly incorrigible men begged his pardon and remained quiet.⁹

Not all acts of courage bring such spectacular or immediate results, and yet all of them do bring peace of mind and a knowledge that right and truth have been defended.

It is impossible to stand upright when one plants his roots in the shifting sands of popular opinion and approval. Needed is the courage of a Daniel, an Abinadi, a Moroni, or a Joseph Smith in order for us to hold strong and fast to that which we know is right. They had the courage to do not that which was easy but that which was right.

We will all face fear, experience ridicule, and meet opposition. Let us—all of us—have the courage to defy the consensus, the courage to stand for principle. Courage, not compromise, brings the smile of God’s approval. Courage becomes a living and an attractive virtue when it is regarded not only as a willingness to die manfully but also as the determination to live decently.

As we move forward, striving to live as we should, we will surely receive help from the Lord and can find comfort in His words. I love His promise recorded in the book of Joshua:

“I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. ...

“... Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”¹⁰

My beloved brethren, with the courage of our convictions, may we declare, with the Apostle Paul, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”¹¹ And then, with that same courage, may we follow Paul’s counsel: “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”¹²

Catastrophic conflicts come and go, but the war waged for the souls of men continues without abatement. Like a clarion call comes the word of the Lord to you, to me, and to priesthood holders everywhere: “Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence.”¹³ Then we will be, as the Apostle Peter declared, even “a royal priesthood,”¹⁴ united in purpose and endowed with power from on high.¹⁵

May each one leave here tonight with the determination and the courage to say, with Job of old, “While my breath is in me, ... I will not remove mine integrity from me.”¹⁶ That this may be so is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen.