

Spiritual Whirlwinds

Neil L. Andersen, *Ensign*, May 2014

I greet you this morning—especially the young people who are both here in the Conference Center and throughout the world. Yours is a chosen generation of destiny, and I speak especially to you.

Many years ago while we were visiting our family in Florida, a tornado touched down not too far from us. One woman living in a mobile home went into her bathroom for safety. The mobile home began to shake. A few moments passed. Then she heard her neighbor's voice: "I am here in the front room." Coming out of the bathroom, to her great astonishment, she discovered that the tornado had lifted and carried her mobile home through the air, landing it perfectly upright on the top of her neighbor's mobile home.

My young friends, the world will not glide calmly toward the Second Coming of the Savior. The scriptures declare that "all things shall be in commotion."¹ Brigham Young said, "It was revealed to me in the commencement of this Church, that the Church would spread, prosper, grow and extend, and that in proportion to the spread of the Gospel among the nations of the earth, so would the power of Satan rise."²

More concerning than the prophesied earthquakes and wars³ are the spiritual whirlwinds that can uproot you from your spiritual foundations and land your spirit in places you never imagined possible, sometimes with you barely noticing that you have been moved.

The worst whirlwinds are the temptations of the adversary. Sin has always been part of the world, but it has never been so accessible, insatiable, and acceptable. There is, of course, a powerful force that will subdue the whirlwinds of sin. It is called repentance. Not all the whirlwinds in life are of your own making. Some come because of the wrong choices of others, and some come just because this is mortality.

As a young boy, President Boyd K. Packer suffered from the crippling disease of polio. When Elder Dallin H. Oaks was seven years old, his father died suddenly. When Sister Carol F. McConkie of the Young Women general presidency was a teenager, her parents divorced. Challenges will come to you, but as you trust in God, they will strengthen your faith.

In nature, trees that grow up in a windy environment become stronger. As winds whip around a young sapling, forces inside the tree do two things. First, they stimulate the roots to grow faster and spread farther. Second, the forces in the tree start creating cell structures that actually make the trunk and branches thicker and more flexible to the pressure of the wind. These stronger roots and branches protect the tree from winds that are sure to return.⁴

You are infinitely more precious to God than a tree. You are His son or His daughter. He made your spirit strong and capable of being resilient to the whirlwinds of life. The whirlwinds in your youth, like the wind against a young tree,

can increase your spiritual strength, preparing you for the years ahead.

How do you prepare for your whirlwinds? "Remember ... it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, ... his shafts in the whirlwind, ... when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power ... to drag you down ... because of the rock upon which ye are built."⁵ This is your safety in the whirlwind.

President Thomas S. Monson has said, "Where once the standards of the Church and the standards of society were mostly compatible, now there is a wide chasm between us, and it's growing ever wider."⁶ This chasm, for some, stirs strong spiritual whirlwinds. Let me share an example.

This past month the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve published a letter to leaders of the Church across the world. In part it read: "Changes in the civil law do not, indeed cannot, change the moral law that God has established. God expects us to uphold and keep His commandments regardless of divergent opinions or trends in society. His law of chastity is clear: sexual relations are proper only between a man and a woman who are legally and lawfully wedded as husband and wife. We urge you to review ... the doctrine contained in 'The Family: A Proclamation to the World.'"⁷

As the world slips away from the Lord's law of chastity, we do not. President Monson said: "The Savior of mankind described Himself as being in the world but not of the world. We also can be in the world but not of the world as we reject false concepts and false teachings and remain true to that which God has commanded."⁸

While many governments and well-meaning individuals have redefined marriage, the Lord has not. In the very beginning, God initiated marriage between a man and a woman—Adam and Eve. He designated the purposes of marriage to go far beyond the personal satisfaction and fulfillment of adults to, more importantly, advancing the ideal setting for children to be born, reared, and nurtured. Families are the treasure of heaven.⁹

Why do we continue to talk about this? As Paul said, "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."¹⁰ As Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the responsibility to teach our Creator's plan for His children and to warn of the consequences of disregarding His commandments.

Recently, I spoke with a Laurel from the United States. I quote from her email:

"This past year some of my friends on Facebook began posting their position on marriage. Many favored same-sex marriage, and several LDS youth indicated they 'liked' the postings. I made no comment.

"I decided to declare my belief in traditional marriage in a thoughtful way.

“With my profile picture, I added the caption ‘I believe in marriage between a man and a woman.’ Almost instantly I started receiving messages. ‘You are selfish.’ ‘You are judgmental.’ One compared me to a slave owner. And I received this post from a great friend who is a strong member of the Church: ‘You need to catch up with the times. Things are changing and so should you.’ ‘I did not fight back,” she said, “but I did not take my statement down.” She concludes: “Sometimes, as President Monson said, ‘You have to stand alone.’ Hopefully as youth, we will stand together in being true to God and to the teachings of His living prophets.”¹¹

Of special concern to us should be those who struggle with same-sex attraction. It is a whirlwind of enormous velocity. I want to express my love and admiration for those who courageously confront this trial of faith and stay true to the commandments of God!¹² But everyone, independent of his or her decisions and beliefs, deserves our kindness and consideration.¹³

The Savior taught us to love not only our friends but also those who disagree with us—and even those who repudiate us. He said: “For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? ... And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?”¹⁴

The Prophet Joseph Smith warned us to “beware of self-righteousness” and to enlarge our hearts toward all men and women until we feel “to take them upon our shoulders.”¹⁵ In the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no place for ridicule, bullying, or bigotry.

If you have a question about counsel from the leaders of the Church, please discuss your honest concerns with your parents and leaders. You need the strength that comes from trusting the Lord’s prophets. President Harold B. Lee said: “The only safety we have as members of this church is to ... learn to give heed to the words and commandments that the Lord shall give through His prophet. ... There will be some things that take patience and faith. You may not like what comes. ... It may contradict your political views ... your social views ... interfere with ... your social life. But if you listen to these things, as if from the mouth of the Lord Himself, ... ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against you ... and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you ...’ (D&C 21:6).”¹⁶

Another powerful protection from the whirlwinds of life is the Book of Mormon.

When President Henry B. Eyring was a teenager, his family moved to a new city. He initially found the move unpleasant and made few friends. He felt like he didn’t fit in with the students in his high school. The whirlwinds were swirling. What did he do? He threw his energy into the Book of Mormon, reading it many times.¹⁷ Years later, President Eyring testified: “I [love to] go back to the Book of Mormon

and drink deeply and often.”¹⁸ “[It] is the most powerful written testimony we have that Jesus is the Christ.”¹⁹

The Lord has given you another way to stand firm, a spiritual gift more powerful than the whirlwinds of the adversary! He said, “Stand ... in holy places, and be not moved.”²⁰

When I was a teenager, there were only 13 temples in the Church. Now there are 142. Eighty-five percent of Church members live within 200 miles (320 km) of a temple. The Lord has given your generation greater access to His holy temples than any other generation in the history of the world.

Have you ever stood in the temple, dressed in white, waiting to do baptisms? How did you feel? There is a tangible feeling of holiness in the temple. The peace of the Savior subdues the swirling whirlwinds of the world.

The way you feel in the temple is a pattern for how you want to feel in your life.²¹

Find your grandfathers and grandmothers and your distant cousins who have gone before you. Take their names to the temple with you.²² As you learn about your ancestors, you will see patterns of life, of marriage, of children; patterns of righteousness; and occasionally patterns that you will want to avoid.²³

Later in the temple you will learn more about the Creation of the world, about the patterns in the lives of Adam and Eve, and most importantly, about our Savior, Jesus Christ.

My young brothers and sisters, how we love you, admire you, and pray for you. Don’t let the whirlwinds drag you down. These are your days—to stand strong as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁴

Build more firmly your foundation upon the rock of your Redeemer.

Treasure more completely His incomparable life and teachings.

Follow more diligently His example and His commandments.

Embrace more deeply His love, His mercy and grace, and the powerful gifts of His Atonement.

As you do, I promise you that you will see the whirlwinds for what they are—tests, temptations, distractions, or challenges to help you grow. And as you live righteously year after year, I assure you that your experiences will confirm to you again and again that Jesus is the Christ. The spiritual rock under your feet will be solid and secure. You will rejoice that God has placed you here to be a part of the final preparations for Christ’s glorious return.

The Savior said, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”²⁵ This is His promise to you. I know this promise is real. I know that He lives, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.