

5. Poem by Orson F. Whitney; quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, "The Things of

Eternity—Stand We in Jeopardy?" *Ensign*, Jan. 1977, 7.

6. *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 119.

Elder Neil L. Andersen

Serve the Lord; follow the prophet

I express my love to you this morning. I speak to the devoted and testimony-filled members of the Church spread across the nations of the earth. The very fact that on this beautiful Saturday morning you are here in the Tabernacle, or watching this conference in some other darkened room in the middle of the day, speaks of your discipleship. You are serious about what you believe, and it shows in your life.

One admonition that has been a strength to me is the powerful declaration of the Prophet Joshua, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

The words of Joshua ring with such relevance today, and yet how we demonstrate our decision to serve the Lord seems to change with each generation. Thirty-five hundred years ago as Joshua spoke, it meant leaving behind false gods, going to battle against the Canaanites, and following with sharp attention the words of the prophet. We can almost hear the whining of the skeptics as Joshua announced his battle plans for taking the city of Jericho. First, he said, they would quietly, without any speaking, circle the city one time for each of six days. Then on the seventh day they would compass the city seven times. Following, the priests would blow the trumpets, and at that time all the people would shout with a great shout. Then, Joshua assured them, the walls would come down. (See Joshua 6.) When the walls came down, the skeptics were quiet.

In our world today, one thing has not changed since Joshua spoke: Those who choose to serve the Lord will always listen attentively and specifically to the prophet. In modern Israel, serving the Lord means carefully following the prophets.

Spiritual mole crickets

The challenges that face us and our families as disciples of Christ are somewhat different than those of Joshua's Israelites. Let me illustrate with an experience. Our family lived for many years in the state of Florida. Because Florida has a high concentration of sand, lawns there are planted with a large broadleaf grass we call Saint Augustine. A formidable enemy of a Florida lawn is a small, brown insect called a mole cricket.

One evening as my neighbor and I stood on the front steps, he noticed a little bug crossing my sidewalk. "You better spray your lawn," he warned. "There goes a mole cricket." I had sprayed the lawn with insecticide not too many weeks previously, and I hardly felt that I had the time or money to do it again so soon.

In the light of the next morning, I examined my lawn closely. It was lush and beautifully green. I looked down into the grass to see if I could see any of the little bugs. I could see none. I remember thinking, "Well, maybe that little mole cricket was just passing through my yard on the way to my neighbor's yard."

I watched my lawn for more than a week, looking for signs of invaders, but none was evident. I congratulated myself

that I had not overreacted to my neighbor's warning.

The story, however, has a sad ending. I came out the front door one morning, about 10 days after the conversation with my neighbor. Shockingly, as if it had happened overnight, brown spots covered my lawn. I ran to the garden store, bought the insecticide, and sprayed immediately, but it was too late. The lawn was ruined, and to return it to its former state required a new crop of sod, long hours of work, and large expense.

My neighbor's warning was central to my lawn's welfare. He saw things I could not see. He knew something I did not know. He knew that mole crickets live underground and are active only at night, making my daytime examinations ineffective. He knew that mole crickets do not eat the leaves of the grass but rather find nourishment in the roots. He knew that these little inch-long creatures could eat a lot of roots before I would ever see the effect above the ground. I paid a dear price for my smug independence.

We live in a wonderful day. The blessings of our generation are lush and beautifully green. With faith in the Savior and obedience to the commandments, our lives can be full of satisfaction and joy.

Yet in these days of much beauty, our challenges in choosing to serve the Lord are more subtle than those of former days, but without question they are as spiritually pervasive. There are spiritual mole crickets that burrow under our protective walls and invade our delicate roots. Many of these insects of wickedness appear small, at times almost invisible. Yet if we do not combat them, they will do damage and attempt to destroy that which is most precious to us.

Prophets' counsel about the family

The warnings of the prophets and apostles lead them ever and always to speak of the home and family. Let me demonstrate the warning voice of the

prophets. On February 11 of this year, the First Presidency, with the support of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, sent to every member of the Church a letter of counsel concerning our families. Let me read you just two sentences from this letter:

"We counsel parents and children to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities. However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform" ("Policies, Announcements, and Appointments," *Ensign*, June 1999, 80).

What is our reaction to this prophetic counsel? What has been my response and your response to this First Presidency letter of nearly eight months ago?

Prayer, scriptures, family home evening

As a parent of teenagers in a busy world, I can confirm that it takes giving these issues our highest priority to see them effectively work in our family. We have just heard the beautiful story of Elder Featherstone and family prayer. With the influences of evil that surround our children, can we even imagine sending them out in the morning without kneeling and humbly asking together for the Lord's protection? Or closing the day without kneeling together and acknowledging our accountability before Him and our thankfulness for His blessings? Brothers and sisters, we need to have family prayer.

Certainly there are times when getting the family together to read the scriptures does not stack up as a spiritual experience worthy of a journal entry. But we must not be deterred. There are special times when the spirit of a son or daughter is just right and the power of these great scriptures goes down into their heart like fire. As we honor our

Heavenly Father in our homes, He will honor our efforts.

We all know the struggle necessary to retain family home evening. There are thieves among us who would steal our Monday nights. But the promises of the Lord made to families who hold family home evening, that were spoken by the First Presidency 84 years ago and reiterated by our prophets today, have never been revoked and are there for us:

"If the Saints obey this counsel, we promise that great blessings will result. Love at home and obedience to parents will increase. Faith will be developed in the hearts of the youth of Israel, and they will gain power to combat the evil influence and temptations which beset them" (in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. [1965-75], 4:339).

Who within the sound of my voice would be willing to sell these promises to those who would confiscate our Monday nights? Not one of us.

For you and me, the disciples of Christ, these moments of building faith in the lives of our children must be strengthened. We will at times fall short as parents. I know I do. But we must begin again. The Lord sees our righteous efforts and will open the blessings of heaven as we give our families our highest priority. My brothers and sisters, there are spiritual mole crickets at work on our roots, and we must be even more serious in our family stewardship.

Always heed the prophets' warnings

As we participate in this conference, let us listen attentively to our dear President Hinckley, his counselors, and the apostles who address us.

Let us not follow the pattern I showed in dealing with my Florida mole crickets. Let us never ignore the warnings. Let us never be smug in our independence.

Let us always be listening and learning in humility and faith, anxious to repent should it be necessary.

This is the kingdom of God upon the earth. You and I are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God. He lives. He directs this work. President Hinckley is His Prophet, and with him are 14 others who hold the apostolic keys. They are watchmen on the tower, messengers of the warning voice, prophets, seers, and revelators.

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

"And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey" (Joshua 24:24).

That these words may be written in our hearts is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Our Savior's Love."

President Hinckley

Elders Vaughn J. Featherstone and Neil L. Andersen of the Seventy have just spoken to us. The choir then sang "Our Savior's Love."

We are grateful to the Bonneville International LDS Radio Network and the owners and operators of the many other television and radio stations, cable systems, and Internet services for offering their facilities as a public service to bring the proceedings of this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world. We also acknowledge the broadcast of these proceedings over the Internet by LDSWorld.com.

We express our appreciation to this wonderful chorus which has sung for us—the Salt Lake and Orem Institutes. Their music has been beautiful, and Brother Brenchley, we thank you ever so much.

President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following his remarks, the choir will sing "Lord, I Would Follow Thee."

The benediction will then be offered by Elder Carlos H. Amado of the Seventy, and the conference will then be adjourned until 2:00 this afternoon.

President Thomas S. Monson

The search for our best selves

During a time long past, and in a place far away, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, taught the multitudes and His disciples "the way, the truth, and the life."¹ He provided counsel with His holy words. He lived an example for us with His exemplary life. On occasion the Lord would ask another this question: "What manner of persons ought ye to be?"²

During His ministry on the American continent, the Lord added significant words when He answered the same question: "What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am."³

In His earthly ministry, the Master outlined how we should live, how we should teach, how we should serve, and what we should do so that we could become our best selves.

One such lesson comes from the book of John in the Holy Bible:

"Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

"And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

"Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"⁴

In our mortal journey, the advice of the Apostle Paul provides heavenly guidance:

"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Then came the concluding charge: "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you."⁵

In the search for our best selves, several questions will guide our thinking: "Am I what I want to be? Am I closer to the Savior today than I was yesterday? Will I be closer yet tomorrow? Do I have the courage to change for the better?"

Return to the family

It is time to choose an oft-forgotten path, the path we might call "The Family Way," so that our children and grandchildren might indeed grow to their full potential. There is a national—even an international—tide running. It carries the unspoken message, "Return to your roots, to your families, to lessons learned, to lives lived, to examples shown, even family values." Often it is just a matter of coming home—coming home to attics not recently examined, to diaries seldom read, to photo albums almost forgotten.

The Scottish poet James Barrie wrote, "God gave us memories, that we might have June roses in the December of our lives."⁶ What memories do we have of Mother? Father? Grandparents? Family? Friends?