

Elder Quentin L. Cook

“Are you a Saint?”

A number of years ago I was in Atlanta, Georgia, as an attorney representing a man who was buying a business. After several days of negotiations, we reached an agreement and signed the closing documents. That evening one of the sellers invited us to a dinner to celebrate the closing. When I arrived, he offered me an alcoholic drink, which I declined. He then said, “Are you a Saint?” I didn’t fully understand what he meant, and he repeated, “Are you a Latter-day Saint?”

I responded, “Yes, I am,” and he said he had been observing my personal habits during our negotiations and had concluded that I was either LDS or had a stomach problem. We both chuckled. He then informed me that he had known only one member of the Church on a personal basis: David B. Haight. They were both executives in Chicago with a large retail chain following World War II. He told me of the significant influence Elder Haight had been in his life and that he held him in the highest regard.

As I flew back home to San Francisco, I thought about what had occurred, especially in two respects: I was surprised at how it felt to be asked if I was a Saint, and I was impressed with the positive influence one outstanding example—Elder Haight—had on this good man.

What it means to be a Saint

What does it mean to be a Saint? In the Lord’s Church, the members are Latter-day Saints, and they attempt to emulate the Savior, follow His teachings, and receive saving ordinances in order to live in the celestial kingdom with God the Father and our Savior Jesus Christ.¹ The Savior said, “This is my gospel; and ye know

the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do.”²

It is not easy to be a Latter-day Saint. It was not meant to be easy. The ultimate goal of living in the presence of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, is a privilege almost beyond comprehension.

“Come, Come, Ye Saints”

Among the greatest trials the Church has ever faced were the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and then ultimately the expulsion of the Saints from Nauvoo. When they were making their way across the plains under very adverse circumstances, William Clayton penned the great hymn “Come, Come, Ye Saints.” It was a hymn that stirred their souls and helped them remember their sacred mission. Who among us does not become emotional as we feel their sacrifice, courage, and commitment when we sing: “And should we die before our journey’s through, / Happy day! All is well!”³

This hymn gave them comfort, solace, and hope in a time of great difficulty with almost insurmountable obstacles. It buoyed them up and highlighted the fact that this mortal life is a journey between premortal life and eternal life to come—the great plan of happiness. Brother Clayton’s inspiring hymn emphasizes sacrifices and what it really means to be a Saint. Our pioneer members met the challenges of their day to be Saints.

Separate ourselves from worldly conduct

The word *saint* in Greek denotes “set apart, separate, [and] holy.”⁴ If we are to be Saints in our day, we need to separate ourselves from evil conduct and destructive pursuits that are prevalent in the world.

We are bombarded with visual images of violence and immorality. Inappropriate music and pornography are increasingly tolerated. The use of drugs and alcohol is rampant. There is less emphasis on honesty and character. Individual rights are demanded, but duties, responsibilities, and obligations are neglected. There has been a coarsening of dialogue and increased exposure to that which is base and vulgar. The adversary has been relentless in his efforts to undermine the plan of happiness. If we separate ourselves from this worldly conduct, we will have the Spirit in our lives and experience the joy of being worthy Latter-day Saints.

Avoid the worship of worldly gods

As Saints we also need to avoid the worship of worldly gods. President Hinckley has expressed the desire that “everyone might have some of the good things of life” but has cautioned, “It is the obsession with riches that cankers and destroys.”⁵

In 1630 John Winthrop set forth a vision for the new land (America) on behalf of his fellow passengers as he sailed on board the *Arbella*. It has become known as “The City upon a Hill” sermon. In the final paragraph, Winthrop references Deuteronomy 30 and warns against worshipping and serving other gods—particularly emphasizing “pleasures, and profits.”⁶ In the recent past, President Kimball counseled that even homes, boats, credentials, titles, and other similar pursuits can be worshiped as idols when they entice us away from love and service to God.⁷

The prophet Moroni, speaking of our day, warned about the love of money and substance and suggested that we would love them more than we “love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.”⁸

If we are to be worthy Saints, we should minister to others and adhere to the Savior’s admonition to love God and our fellowmen.

Let holiness and sacrifice guide your life

Separation from the evils of the world needs to be accompanied by holiness. A Saint loves the Savior and follows Him in holiness and devotion.⁹ Evidence of this kind of holiness and devotion is exemplified by consecration and sacrifice. President Hinckley taught, “Without sacrifice there is no true worship of God.”¹⁰ Sacrifice is the crowning test of the gospel. It means consecrating time, talents, energy, and earthly possessions to further the work of God. In Doctrine and Covenants 97, verse 8, it concludes, “All . . . who . . . are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me.”

Saints who respond to the Savior’s message will not be led astray by distracting and destructive pursuits and will be prepared to make appropriate sacrifices. The importance of sacrifice to those who want to be Saints is exemplified by the atoning sacrifice of the Savior, which is at the center of the gospel.¹¹

Three questions for self-assessment

Coming back to the original question that my acquaintance in Atlanta asked, “Are you a Saint?” may I suggest three questions that will allow for a self-assessment.

First, is the way we live consistent with what we believe, and would our friends and associates recognize, as Elder Haight’s friend did, that we have separated ourselves from worldly evils?

Second, are worldly pleasures, profits, and similar pursuits distracting us from following, worshipping, and serving the Savior in our daily lives?

Third, in order to serve God and be holy, are we making sacrifices consistent with our covenants?

What a wonderful blessing it is to be a Latter-day Saint. I love the words in the last lines of the hymn “O Saints of Zion”:

O Saints of Zion, tread the paths
Your faithful fathers trod.
Lift up your hearts in gratitude
And serve the living God!¹²

I testify that avoiding evil and destructive pursuits and sacrificing in order to serve will qualify us to experience the joy of being committed Latter-day Saints and, as the scriptures promise, bring “peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come.”¹³ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See 2 Nephi 9:18.
2. 3 Nephi 27:21.

3. *Hymns*, no. 30.

4. In Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. (1992), 3:1249.

5. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Thou Shalt Not Covet,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1990, 4–5.

6. “A Model of Christian Charity,” in Robert L. Ferm, ed., *Issues in American Protestantism* (1969), 11.

7. See *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (1969), 40–41.

8. Mormon 8:37.

9. See Wm. Grant Bangerter, in Conference Report, Apr. 1987, 12; or *Ensign*, May 1987, 11.

10. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 565.

11. See Alma 34:8–16.

12. *Hymns*, no. 39.

13. Doctrine and Covenants 59:23.

Bishop Richard C. Edgley

Heroes are all around us

Some time ago in my high priests quorum meeting, the instructor introduced the lesson by asking each of us to respond to who our hero is and why. As each member took his turn responding, the answers were not unexpected. Of course, someone named the Savior, the Redeemer of the world. Another spoke of Abraham Lincoln, who freed the slaves, led the United States through a civil war, and eventually unified the country. Others chose the Prophet Joseph Smith and our beloved current prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley. As each named a hero, I silently concurred and acknowledged that all of these were men worthy of emulating and that I would be a better person if I possessed some of the qualities that made those men great.

When my turn came to respond, I turned to a brother on my right, a few seats down the row from me, and said, “My hero is Ken Sweatfield and his wife, Jo Ann.”

For 20 years I watched Ken and Jo Ann care for their comatose son with all the love and patience a parent could possibly give. I had often pondered the shattered hopes and dreams they surely had for Shane before he suffered a terrible automobile accident just two weeks before he was to begin his mission in Leeds, England. I have watched Ken and Jo Ann wheel Shane into the sunlight or push him through the neighborhood, describing the scenery, hoping that he might hear and feel, and hoping that the fresh air and sunlight might lighten a very subdued spirit. For 20 years there were no vacations from this care, few evenings out, but there was always a spirit of faith, optimism, and gratitude—never a show of anger, despair, or questioning of God’s purposes.

I then turned to a brother on my left and said, “My hero is Jim Newton and his wife, Helen.” Shortly after Jim and Helen’s son Zach received his mission call to Peru, he was taken in an automobile accident.