

Elder Patrick Kearon

Tonight I would like to share a message of comfort and healing with any of you who feels alone or forsaken, has lost peace of mind or heart, or feels that you have thrown away your last chance. Complete healing and peace can be found at the feet of the Savior.

A scorpion's sting

As a seven-year-old boy living in the Arabian Peninsula, I was consistently told by my parents to *always* wear my shoes, and I understood why. I knew that shoes would protect my feet against the many threats to be found in the desert, such as snakes, scorpions, and thorns. One morning after a night's camping in the desert, I wanted to go exploring, but I did not want to bother with putting on my shoes. I rationalized that I was only going for a little wander and I would stay close by the camp. So instead of shoes, I wore flip-flops. I told myself that flip-flops were shoes—of a sort. And anyway, what could possibly happen?

As I walked along the cool sand—in my flip-flops—I felt something like a thorn going into the arch of my foot. I looked down and saw not a thorn but a scorpion. As my mind registered the scorpion and I realized what had just happened, the pain of the sting began to rise from my foot and up my leg. I grabbed the top of my leg to try and stop the searing pain from moving farther, and I cried out for help. My parents came running from the camp.

As my father battered the scorpion with a shovel, an adult friend who was camping with us heroically tried to suck the venom from my foot. At this moment I thought that I was going to die. I sobbed while my parents loaded me into a car and set off across the desert at high speed toward the nearest hospital, which was over two hours away. The pain all through my

leg was excruciating, and for that entire journey, I assumed that I was dying.

When we finally reached the hospital, however, the doctor was able to assure us that only small infants and the severely malnourished are threatened by the sting of that type of scorpion. He administered an anesthetic, which numbed my leg and took away any sensation of pain. Within 24 hours I no longer had any effects from the sting of the scorpion. But I had learned a powerful lesson.

I had known that when my parents told me to wear shoes, they did not mean flip-flops; I was old enough to know that flip-flops did not provide the same protection as a pair of shoes. But that morning in the desert, I disregarded what I knew to be right. I ignored what my parents had repeatedly taught me. I had been both lazy and a little rebellious, and I paid a price for it.

As I address you valiant young men, your fathers, teachers, leaders, and friends, I pay tribute to all who are diligently striving to become what the Lord needs and wants you to be. But I testify from my own experience as a boy and as a man that disregarding what we know to be right, whether through laziness or rebelliousness, always brings undesirable and spiritually damaging consequences. No, the scorpion did not in the end threaten my life, but it caused extreme pain and distress to both me and my parents. When it comes to how we live the gospel, we must not respond with laziness or rebelliousness.

Giving our whole hearts to God

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ and as bearers of the priesthood, we know the commandments and standards we have covenanted to uphold. When we choose another path from the one we know to be right, as taught by our parents and leaders and as confirmed to

our own hearts by the Holy Ghost, it is like stepping onto the desert sand in flip-flops instead of shoes. We then seek to justify our lazy or rebellious behavior. We tell ourselves we're not really doing anything that wrong, that it doesn't really matter, and that nothing all that bad will result from letting go just a little from the iron rod. Perhaps we console ourselves with the thought that everyone else is doing it—or doing worse—and we won't be negatively affected anyway. We somehow convince ourselves that we are the exception to the rule and therefore immune to the consequences of breaking it. We refuse, sometimes willfully, to be "exactly obedient"¹—as it says in *Preach My Gospel*—and we hold back a portion of our hearts from the Lord. And then we get stung.

The scriptures teach us that "the Lord requireth the heart,"² and we are commanded to love the Lord and serve Him with "all [our] heart."³ The promise is that we "may stand blameless before God at the last day"⁴ and return to His presence.

The Anti-Nephi-Lehies in the Book of Mormon laid down their weapons of war and buried them deep in the earth, covenanting never again to take up arms against their brethren. But they did more than that. "They became a righteous people" because "they did lay down the weapons of their *rebellion*, that they did not fight against God any more."⁵ Their conversion was so complete and so profound that they "never did fall away."⁶

But before their conversion, remember their state: they were living in what the scriptures call "open rebellion against God."⁷ Their rebellious hearts sentenced them to live "in a state contrary to the nature of happiness" because they had "gone contrary to the nature of God."⁸

When they laid down their weapons of *rebellion*, they qualified themselves for the Lord's healing and peace, and so can we. The Savior assures, "If they harden not their hearts, and stiffen not their necks

against me, they shall be converted, and *I will heal them.*"⁹ You and I can accept His invitation to "return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal [you]."¹⁰

Contrast this miraculous healing with what happens "when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride [or] our vain ambition. . . . The heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved;" and we are left alone "to kick against the pricks . . . and to fight against God."¹¹

Brethren, we find healing and relief only when we bring ourselves to the feet of the Great Physician, our Savior, Jesus Christ. We must lay down our weapons of rebellion (and we each know what they are). We must lay down our sin, vanity, and pride. We must give up our desires to follow the world and to be respected and lauded by the world. We must cease fighting against God and instead give our *whole hearts* to Him, holding nothing back. Then He can heal us. Then He can cleanse us from the venomous sting of sin.

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."¹²

Staying on the safe track

President James E. Faust taught:

"When obedience becomes our goal, it is no longer an irritation; instead of a stumbling block, it becomes a building block."

"Obedience leads to true freedom. The more we obey revealed truth, the more we become liberated."¹³

Last week I met a 92-year-old man who had been involved in many of the major campaigns of World War II. He had survived three injuries, one of which was a land-mine blast to the jeep in which he was traveling, which killed the driver. *He learned that to survive in a minefield, you must follow exactly in the tracks of the vehicle moving ahead of you.* Any deviation

to the right or left could—and indeed did—prove fatal.

Our prophets and apostles, leaders and parents continually point out the track we must follow if we would avoid a destructive blast to our souls. They know the path that has been safely cleared of mines (or indeed scorpions), and they tirelessly invite us to follow behind them. There are so many devastating traps to entice us from the track. Straying into drugs, alcohol, pornography, or immoral behavior over the Internet or on a video game will head us straight toward an explosion. Deviating to the right or the left of the safe track ahead of us, whether because of laziness or rebelliousness, can prove fatal to our spiritual lives. There are no exceptions to this rule.

If we have strayed from the track, we can change, we can return, and we can recapture our joy and our inner peace. We will discover that returning to the track from which the land mines have been removed brings enormous relief.

No one can find peace in a minefield.

Our Savior is the Prince of Peace, the Great Healer, the only One who can truly cleanse us from the sting of sin and the poison of pride and change our rebellious hearts into converted, covenant hearts. His Atonement is infinite and embraces us all.

The invitation given to the Nephites, when He ministered to them as the resurrected Christ, is still in force for you

and for me: “Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither *and I will heal them.*”¹⁴

Not one of you has thrown away your last chance. You can change, you can come back, you can claim mercy. Come unto the only One who can heal, and you will find peace. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), inside back cover.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 64:34; italics added.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 4:2; 59:5; italics added.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 4:2.
5. Alma 23:7; italics added.
6. Alma 23:6.
7. Mosiah 2:37; Alma 3:18; see also Mormon 2:15.
8. Alma 41:11.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 112:13; italics added.
10. 3 Nephi 18:32.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 121:37, 38.
12. John 3:17.
13. James E. Faust, in Conference Report, Apr. 1999, 61, 60; or *Ensign*, May 1999, 47, 45.
14. 3 Nephi 17:7; italics added.

Elder Juan A. Uceda

A lesson in family love and harmony

One morning a family gathered to study the scriptures as usual. As they gathered, the father felt a negative spirit: some members of the family did not look very excited to participate. They had family prayer, and as they started to read the scriptures, the father noticed that one of the children did

not have her personal set of scriptures with her. He invited her to go to her room and bring her scriptures. She reluctantly did so, and after a period of time that seemed like an eternity, she returned, sat down, and said, “Do we really have to do this now?”

The father thought to himself that the enemy of all righteousness wanted to