

Be Still, and Know That I Am God

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My dear young brothers and sisters, I am happy to speak to you from San Diego, California. It's a pleasure to be at this CES devotional tonight. We welcome all you young adults this evening, including you important senior high school students. We are happy to have you with us. We also welcome the returned missionaries. The Church and the Lord are grateful for all of your service!

Finally, we welcome you who are prospective missionaries. The Lord needs righteous young women and young men to help us gather Israel and prepare the world for His Second Coming.

I want you to know that the Lord loves you and trusts you. The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles believe in you and pray for you often. You are the future of the Church, and the Lord has many wonderful blessings for you as you live your lives.

Let me repeat and emphasize that point—you will lead the Church in 20 to 30 years from now. Some of you will serve as bishop, stake presidents; mission presidents; Primary, Young Women, and Relief Society presidents; and temple presidents and matrons. Within the reach of my voice tonight are those who will most likely become leaders in communities and nations of the world. There will be those who will be members of the general women's presidencies or even a General Authority Seventy or perhaps a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Today you do not know what a remarkable future is before you!

Church Leaders

I have heard that some people think the Church leaders live in a "bubble." What they forget is that we are men and women with life experience, and we have lived our lives in so many places and worked with many people from different backgrounds. Our current assignments literally take us around the globe, where we meet the political, religious, business, and humanitarian leaders of the world. Although we have visited the White House in Washington, D.C., and leaders of nations throughout the world, we have also visited the most humble homes on earth, where we have met and ministered to the poor.

When you thoughtfully consider our lives and ministry, you will most likely agree that we see and experience the world in ways that others do. You will realize that we live less in a "bubble" than most people.

Others say we are too old. Well, it is true that nine of the Apostles are over 80 years of age! I am 85.

However, there is something about the individual and combined wisdom of the Brethren that should provide some comfort. We have experienced it all, including the consequences of different public laws and policies, disappointments, tragedies, and deaths in our own families. We are not out of touch with your lives.

Let me also observe that none of the Twelve are shrinking violets. We each have strong personalities. So when we are unified in a decision, you can rest assured that we have counseled together and come to that decision after much prayer and thoughtful discussion.

My grandchildren even think I am “pretty cool”—to use their term. I have heard that some young single adults say that I am “hip” hope it’s good to be “hip”!

We are young at heart, and the Lord blesses us to move His work forward in remarkable ways. Tonight I will discuss with you three important subjects: one, the use of technology; two, combating pornography; and three, the doctrine of marriage—three important issues that we are faced with today.

1. Use of Technology

First is the use of technology. In 2007 and 2008, I spoke to the graduating students at BYU–Hawaii and BYU–Idaho. On those occasions I said, “We cannot stand on the sidelines while others, including our critics, attempt to define what the Church teaches.”¹ At that time I urged the graduates to use the advances in technology to become involved in the worldwide conversation about the Church. I thought I was rather up to date when I suggested that they share their views on blogs. Since then, I have been introduced to Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Google+, Instagram, and then my secretary told me, just as I was leaving, something about Snapchat. Wow seems like the world of technology cannot stand still for even a few minutes.

My cell phone is amazing! Smartphones are truly smart! They provide us so many wonderful opportunities, including accessing information, getting map directions, sharing photos and messages, and even once in a while actually talking to someone.

The modern world in which we now live is ever changing, which in some ways is good and in some ways can be not so good.

Differences between the Past and the Present

From the days of Adam and Eve until the days of Joseph and Emma Smith, the world changed rather slowly from one generation to another.

People living in the past enjoyed an abundance of natural heavenly light and comfortable darkness, without streetlights, headlights and light pollution found in all our cities across the world. In the cities of today, it is almost impossible to see the night sky Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Elisabeth, Jesus, and the early Latter-day Saints did.

They also enjoyed a natural silence, with few man-made sounds interrupting their days and especially their nights. Modern noise from cars, planes, and something some of you may refer to as music has completely drowned out the natural world. (You have to understand, from my generation, what you think is music and what I think is music—we’re a long ways apart.) You can no longer go to a restaurant without music being played in the background. Even in remote forests in the world, the silence is often broken by the flight of a jet above in the sky.

Finally, the people of earlier times experienced solitude in ways we cannot imagine in our crowded and busy world. Even when we are alone today, we can be tuned in with our handheld devices, laptops, and TVs to keep us entertained and occupied.

As an Apostle, I now ask you a question: Do you have any personal quiet time? I have wondered if those who lived in the past had more opportunity than we do now to see, feel, and experience the presence of the Spirit in their lives.

Seemingly, as our world gets brighter, louder, and busier, we have a greater challenge feeling the Spirit in our lives. If your life is void of quiet time, would you begin tonight to seek for some?

Prophetic Counsel

It is important to be still and listen and follow the Spirit. We simply have too many distractions to capture our attention, unlike the time in the history of the world.

Everyone needs time to meditate and contemplate. Even the Savior of the world, during His mortal ministry, found time to do so: “When he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.”²

We all need time to ask ourselves questions or to have a regular personal interview with ourselves. We are often so busy and the world is so loud that it is difficult to hear the heavenly words “be still, and know that I am God.”³

Handheld devices, such as smartphones, are a blessing, but they can also distract us from hearing the “still, small voice.” They need to be our servants, not our masters. For example, if later tonight you share inspiring thoughts from this devotional on social media, your smartphone is a servant. If you randomly surf the Internet, your smartphone is a master.

Remember what Elijah learned: “The Lord was not in the wind; ... the Lord was not in the earthquake: ... the Lord was not in the fire, but the Lord spoke in the “still small voice.”⁴

Our Use of Technology

Another question: Honestly, how much time do you spend every day on your cell phone or tablet, not including school or Church work?

Their use is appropriate, and they are a blessing. However, when smartphones begin to interfere with our relationships with friends and family—and even more importantly, with God—we need to make a change. For some of you, the adjustment will be slight; for others, it may be significant.

I am also concerned that excessive text messaging, Facebooking, tweeting, and Instagraming are replacing talking—talking directly one to another and talking in prayer with our Heavenly Father and thinking about the things that matter most in life.

Too often, young people find themselves in the same room with family or friends but are busy communicating with someone else present, thereby missing an opportunity to visit with those nearby. When this happens, maybe you need to leave the room and send a text message back to them to get their attention!

What I have learned most in my life came from listening to those with great experience, those who had lived longer and learned many important things that I needed to know. Please take advantage to visit and talk with your parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents while they are still with you.

I also worry that some of you check your email, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram accounts or send text messages during the most important gathering in the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—our sacred sacrament meeting. In this important meeting we should be focusing on the Lord through praying, singing hymns, and partaking the emblems of His body and blood instead of hooking up to our multimedia devices. You cannot connect to the Spirit during the presentation of the sacrament while looking at or sending a message on your smartphone or your tablet. This connection requires the Light of Christ, settling from your minds into your hearts with burning love and devotion.

I know that many of you have your scriptures and other Church resources on your phones and tablets. And I've even heard that some parents and Church leaders are concerned about this newest development, but I am not.

The Church has always adopted advances in technology to help push the work of the Lord forward. We began sending missionaries on sailing ships in the 1830s, but we adopted the advances offered by steamships in the 1860s. And then we embraced airlines as the best means to get our missionaries to their assignments throughout the world in the 1960s.

History does repeat itself in the most interesting ways. In the past, Israel preserved the words of the prophets on scrolls. At some point the early Christians adopted the codex, the early version of the modern book.

Here we are 2,000 years later, and you young people are reading your scriptures on smartphones or tablets—reading them as Jesus did when He was given an Isaiah scroll to read from in Nazareth. You too can “scroll”⁵—but please, do not “scroll” during the presentation of the sacrament. Surely, during those few minutes you can focus on the Atonement of the Savior as you seek the Spirit of the Lord to bless you for the coming week. And consider putting your smartphone or your tablet in airplane mode for the entire Sunday block. You will still have your scriptures, general conference talks, hymnbook, and manuals, but you will not be distracted by incoming text messages or push notifications.

Refuge from the Storm

In addition to finding time to contemplate and meditate, we also need to find a place, as mentioned in the Doctrine and Covenants that will be “a defense, and ... a refuge from the storm.”⁶

We need a special place of refuge where we can wean ourselves from the distractions of our electronic devices by unplugging them we can connect to the Spirit of God.

One of the best places to connect with the Spirit is in the temple—the house of the Lord. Of course, the same can be said of our other dedicated Church buildings, including seminary and institute classrooms. We can find refuge in our homes or apartments when choose to simply shut things off and be still and know of the things of God.

To help us discover the world where Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, and Joseph and Mary found God, and to help us find a place to feel and hear the voice of the Lord today, I invite you to go to the temple. Go as often as you can, and turn off your smartphone and put them away before you enter the temple grounds.

In all the ordinances in the house of the Lord, you will hear beautiful language, words, and promises given by the Lord to His child. It is the only place you can hear those beautiful, inspiring words.

If you do not qualify for a temple recommend right now, visit the temple grounds. Let me make a very important point in case you have never heard it before: Nothing prevents you or anyone else from visiting the temple grounds. The Lord wants you to prepare yourself to be worthy of a temple recommend and come to the temple as soon as you can. Walking the grounds will plant in your heart a desire to get a recommend and attend the temple regularly.

Satan, on the other hand, does not want you to go to the temple or even to stand in the shadow of a temple. He wants you to avoid even getting close to the temple because the temple is the house of the Lord.

I assure each of you that as you go to the temple or visit the temple grounds, you will walk on sacred, holy ground just as the patriarchs and matriarchs did so long ago. They were focused on their eternal journey and the most important things of life. Like them, you can also focus on feeling power and the presence of heaven.

If you choose, you can hear the still, small voice of the Spirit in the temple or on its sacred grounds in ways you never will at the noise in restaurants, and in public places. In fact, you will find that the temple is a wonderful place to receive answers to your prayers.

Recently, President Thomas S. Monson dedicated the Gilbert Arizona Temple. During the dedicatory prayer he asked the Lord, “I Thy Holy Spirit dwell here, and may its influence be felt by all who come within these walls.” He also prayed: “May this, Thy house, be a sanctuary of serenity, a refuge from the storms of life and the noise of the world. May it be a house of quiet contemplation concerning the eternal nature of life and of Thy divine plan for us.”⁷

All temples dedicated to the Lord are “a sanctuary of serenity, a refuge from the storms of life and the noise of the world ... [a]n house of quiet contemplation.”

The Opposition

The world in which we now live is moving very rapidly away from the teachings of Christ in its laws and its customs. As a result, Satan is working overtime to confuse God's sons and daughters and to divert the very elect from fulfilling their duty and receiving a fullness of the Lord's blessings.

Satan wants you to stop practicing good habits you learned at home, in seminary and institute, and on your missions—such as having daily scripture study, praying daily, worthily partaking of the sacrament weekly, and giving genuine, heartfelt service. He also wants you to stand on the sidelines in today's important and crucial battles.

Remember, my dear young people, we are at war—but not a war of guns and bullets. Nevertheless, the war is real, with countless human casualties. The war is in fact a continuation of the one that began in the premortal world.

Paul invited us to “put on the whole armour of God.” He said, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”⁸

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I invite all of you within the sound of my voice, in the vast world that we now live in, to “put on the whole armour of God” and join the battle today, like the sons of Helaman did so many years ago. Don't wait until you get mar-

or start your lifelong career or get older. The Church needs our youth now. The Lord needs you now!

You will recall that 2,000 stripling warriors “entered into a covenant to fight for the liberty of the Nephites.”⁹ The Church needs modern stripling warriors who have made a covenant “to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places.”

The Book of Mormon describes these stripling warriors as follows:

“They were all young ... , and they were exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was all—they were ... true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted.

“Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk upright before him.”¹¹

You young women and young men are the modern daughters and sons of Helaman. May it be said of you as it was said of them: “They became now at this period of time ... a great support.”¹²

2. Combating Pornography

The second thing that I want to talk to you about is that we need you to join with us in the fight against pornography. It’s a terrible plague that is spreading across the world. I ask you tonight to listen to me as I explain an example of the Lord’s wisdom.

More than 180 years ago, the Lord revealed His law of health, including a warning about the use of tobacco.¹³ Millions of people listened to the Lord, but many more did not. No one knew at that time or even when I was your age the long-term effects of smoking. Today, after decades of scientific research, we now know smoking’s effect on lung cancer and other deadly diseases. The Lord’s Word of Wisdom was a protective blessing.

In similar ways the Lord in our day has warned us about the effects of pornography. Millions of people faithfully follow the Lord’s counsel, whereas countless others do not. We don’t have to wait, my dear friends, for 180 or even for 10 years to discover devastating effects of pornography because current scientific research has revealed that pornography cripples young adults in several ways and poisons their chances of one day having a loving and lasting marriage relationship.

Research has also shown that frequent use of pornography can lead to obsessive behaviors and can rewire the brain to capture a person in the prison of addiction.

Research has also verified that pornography fosters unrealistic expectations and delivers dangerous misinformation about human intimacy.

Most insidiously, pornography conditions you to see people as objects that you can disregard and disrespect both emotionally and physically.

Another aspect of pornography is that it is generally a “secret” activity. Users often hide their use or at least minimize their use from everyone, including their romantic partners and spouses. Studies have found that when people engage in this type of concealment—when they do things they are not proud of and keep those things a secret from their family members and friends not only hurts their relationships and leaves them feeling lonely but also makes them more vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and poor self-esteem. Keeping secrets damages trust.

Initially, we must avoid pornography ourselves because it is deadly. It kills genuine, tender human relationships—destroys marriages and families. It destroys the spirit of the person who consumes it as surely as the most deadly poison kills the body and mind.

My dear young brothers and sisters, do not be deceived. Do not think that once you go on your mission or once you get married you can stop this addictive behavior. If you are involved in it now, if you are entrapped in this practice, get spiritual help now. You can overcome pornography with the Savior’s assistance. Do not wait! I plead with you to leave it alone! There are many resources on LDS.org that will override the darkness of pornographic images.

These are challenging days—but no more challenging than the days of Helaman and his stripling warriors when they stood to defend their families and the Church. This is your time to step forward and join the ranks of other righteous and dedicated young men and young women to fight the battle against pornography.

3. The Doctrine of Marriage

Now I want to talk to you about the third subject. And I want you to understand, as carefully as I can, the position of the Church on marriage as our Heavenly Father has given us through the scriptures and “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” That inspired document states: “The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.”¹⁴

Apostles are charged to be watchmen on the towers to see and teach the doctrines of Christ. All of you know that the traditional definition of marriage is under attack today. There are those who are framing the discussion focused in terms of civil rights. The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained the Church’s position and doctrine of God’s purpose and plan for His spirit children to experience mortal life, which is essential to our everlasting and eternal life.

I would suppose many of you may not have read the statement issued earlier this year. I quote from this statement and ask you to listen carefully:

“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 and teach Church members the doctrine contained in ‘The Family: A Proclamation to the World.’”

The statement continues:

“Just as those who promote same-sex marriage are entitled to civility, the same is true for those who oppose it. ...

“As members of the Church, we are responsible to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to illuminate the great blessings that flow from heeding God’s commandments as well as the inevitable consequences of ignoring them. We invite you to pray that people everywhere will have their hearts softened to the truths of the gospel, and that wisdom will be granted to those who are called upon to deal with issues critical to society’s future.”¹⁵

I know you love and support the Lord and sustain His prophets, but I also know that some of you may be confused on the moral implications of the Church’s decision to sustain God’s revealed plan for His children.

I also know that some of our youth struggle to understand how to explain the doctrine surrounding family and marriage and remain kind, gentle, and loving toward those who do not agree. You may be afraid that you will be labeled as a bigot and as bigoted and intolerant.

You may know someone who struggles with same-sex attraction or has made a decision to live in a same-gender relationship. Your love for that person as a son or daughter of God can create an inward struggle as you try to love and support him or her and stand for the Lord’s eternal plan of happiness.

Let us be clear tonight—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes that “the experience of same-sex attraction is a complex reality for many people. The attraction itself is not a sin, but acting on it is. Even though individuals do not choose to have such attractions, they do choose how to respond to them. With love and understanding, the Church reaches out to all God’s children, including [those with same-sex attraction].”¹⁶

The Church does not teach or advocate shunning or other unchristianlike actions. We must love and strive to help others understand that no one should ignore or discount the commandments of God.

A Witness and a Warning

Finally, in *“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,”* the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated: *“We warn that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”*¹⁷

*I am one who joined in that warning. As one of the watchmen on the tower, I am responsible to “blow the trumpet, and warn people.”*¹⁸ *This evening I have been bold and raised the warning voice. I do so because I love you and want you to understand we must face the Lord and keep His commandments. That is my duty.*

The Good News

*The Lord’s warning also comes with an invitation to come unto Him. Our Father in Heaven knew the consequences of living in a fallen world and, therefore, provided a Savior, a “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” for His children.*¹⁹ *In the gospel of John, we learn, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*²⁰

Please remember that the gospel is the “good news.” It is a message of hope. If you are in trouble now, get help. The Lord is merciful and forgiving.

The Apostle Paul taught:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril of sword? ...

“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

“Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Because of Jesus Christ, peace can replace guilt. Healthy relationships can be restored. Addictions can be overcome.

*We need to let our family and our friends know this truth—God is love, “and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him.”*²²

We need you to be engaged in the work of salvation before and during and after your missions.

Using Technology to Bless Lives

The Lord invites you to get involved and use the social media platforms you prefer to share the gospel and stand as modern sons and daughters of Helaman in the great battles of the last days. He wants you to become the modern stripling warriors who stand strong and united to defend the truth. He wants you to be courageous and stalwart in the face of the enemy’s advances. We know that in the end the Lord will win the day and Satan will be defeated.

Through various social media platforms, you can have gospel conversations with family, friends, and, for you returned missionaries even with former investigators and new members. You can stand as witnesses to the truth and defend the kingdom.

Defending the Kingdom

I know some of you worry about being misjudged, ridiculed, and even harassed if you stand up for Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and the Church. I understand your concerns.

I served in the British Mission after the end of World War II as a young missionary. At that time Mormons were “a hiss and a byword,”²³ and missionaries were laughed at and ridiculed. People even threw things at us, and some would spit at us. However, we did not retreat, but we continued to bear our testimonies and share the gospel. Like Abinadi, we did not shrink; like Paul, we did not shrink; and like the Savior, we did not shrink. At the time we could not have imagined the impact of our labors. We had 14 districts

and no stakes. Today, 46 stakes of Zion are found in the British Isles.

My dear beloved young friends, don't worry about those in the large and spacious building. Nephi saw that they would mock and point "their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit."²⁴ Don't be like those who "after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.

You are a great and important generation, and this is a great time to be alive! The future is bright. Say to yourself tonight, "I am helping the Lord as I reach out to share my testimony and to teach the truths God has revealed in these last days."

Now, you have the opportunity to use all of this social media wisely to share what you have learned and felt tonight. Remember that there is a proper time and place for you to use social media, and sharing your thoughts and testimony of the things you are learning and feeling is one of those times.

Testimony and Witness

May the Lord bless you with wisdom beyond your years, that you will wisely realize that we are in this battle and we must stand together, young and old. I pray our Heavenly Father will watch over you and bless you. Please, again, know how much we love you. And I ask our Heavenly Father to bless each and every one of you, wherever you are in this world, who are hearing this devotional tonight, with the peace of the Lord in your hearts, with the calm witness and assurance that Jesus Christ does live, that He is the Son of God, that this is His Church. May that peace and power be with you. May our Heavenly Father watch over you. May you never give up in this journey you are on, you are precious, every one of you, to the future of preparing the world for that day when Jesus Christ will say "It is enough" and will return and rule and reign as the Savior, the Lord of lords, the King of kings, the Redeemer of the world, and I testify lives. We have been talking about those things that are important to Him tonight. May we leave this meeting filled with love for the Lord and a desire to serve Him is my humble prayer, in the sacred and in the beloved name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

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Notes

M. Russell Ballard, "Using New Media to Support the Work of the Church" (Brigham Young University–Hawaii commencement address, Dec. 15, 2007); devotional.byuh.edu; see also M. Russell Ballard, "Making Your Influence Felt" (Brigham Young University–Idaho commencement address, Apr. 11, 2008); byui.edu/Presentations).

Matthew 14:23.

Psalm 46:10; see also Doctrine and Covenants 101:16.

1 Kings 19:11–12.

See Luke 4:17.

Doctrine and Covenants 115:6.

"A Refuge from the Storms of Life," Church News, Mar. 9, 2014, 5.

Ephesians 6:11–12.

Alma 53:17.

Mosiah 18:9.

Alma 53:20–21.

Alma 53:19.

See Doctrine and Covenants 89.

"The Family: A Proclamation to the World," Ensign, Nov. 2010, 129.

Letter from the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, dated Jan. 10, 2014 (United States) and Mar. 6, 2 (outside the United States); <https://www.lds.org/church/news/lds-church-instructs-leaders-regarding-same-sex-marriage?lang=en&query=same-sex+marriage>.

"Love One Another: A Discussion on Same-Sex Attraction"; mormonsandgays.org.

"The Family: A Proclamation to the World."

Ezekiel 33:3; see Ezekiel 33:1–9.

Revelation 13:8.

John 3:16.

Romans 8:35, 37–39.

2 Nephi 26:33.

3 Nephi 16:9.

1 Nephi 8:27.

1 Nephi 8:28.