

Follow the Brethren

Boyd K. Packer,

BYU, 23 March 1965.

CES Manual, *Living Prophets for a Living Church*, pg. 204-207.

It is good to be on this campus again, brethren and sisters. I, too, compliment the choir for their inspirational singing. The Lord has said that his soul delighteth “in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.” (D&C 25:12.) Those who have participated this morning in rendering this music so beautifully have called forth blessings upon their heads.

I confess, brethren and sisters, I have been restless over this assignment; I suppose I have been hesitant because of the feeling that perhaps my choice of words or inadequate ability to express or to emphasize may make the subject chosen seem unimportant to you. I am not afraid that you will misunderstand what I say, but because the subject has been reviewed before you so many times that you will fail to see in it something significant and important.

This is a devotional assembly. This is the one assembly for the entire student body of the University which is called for devotional or inspirational purposes. As we come here to speak to you, representing the General Authorities of the Church, we are under much more of an obligation than to merely be informative. I sense that many of you come here with the expectation that you may draw forth from us answers to some questions that you may have.

Since this is a devotional assembly, you have the right to expect some inspiration from your attendance here. But I think that it is important that you know this: the inspiration you may draw from the General Authorities as they come here to speak to you depends only partly on the effort they have expended in the preparation *of* their sermons; it depends much more considerably on what preparation you have made *for* their message. In this I make no differentiation between the members of the faculty and the student body.

There is a tendency always for us to be a little resistant to instruction. We hear a stirring sermon and we are always wont to say, “I wish Brother Jones were here. He surely needed that instruction.”

Or we may even hear a sermon and consent to the truth of the words and yet be unwilling to change.

A poet framed this:

The sermon was ended,
The priest had descended.
Much delighted were they,
But preferred the old way.

With that much said by way of introduction, the whole burden of my message today can be said in three simple words:

FOLLOW THE BRETHREN Though I may elaborate and attempt to illustrate and emphasize, there is the fact, the disarmingly simple fact, that in the three words, **FOLLOW THE BRETHREN**, rests the most important counsel that I could give to you.

There is a lesson to be drawn from the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew. The occasion, the Last Supper. Quoting from the twenty-first verse:

And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

I remind you that these men were apostles. They were of apostolic stature. It has always been interesting to me that they did not on that occasion, nudge one another and say, “I’ll bet that is old Judas. He has surely been acting queer lately.” It reflects something of their stature. Rather it is recorded that:

They were exceedingly sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? (Matthew 26:22.)

Would you, I plead, overrule the tendency to disregard counsel and assume for just a moment something apostolic in attitude at least, and ask yourself these questions: Do I need to improve myself? Should I take this counsel to heart and act upon it? If there is one weak or failing, unwilling to follow the brethren, Lord, is it I?

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints there is no paid ministry, no professional clergy, as is common in other churches. More significant even than this is that there is no laity, no lay membership as such; men are eligible to hold the priesthood and to carry on the ministry of the Church, and both men and women serve in many auxiliary capacities. This responsibility comes to men in all walks of life, and with this responsibility also comes the authority. There are many who would deny, and others who would disregard it; nevertheless, the measure of that authority does not depend on whether men sustain that authority, but rather depends on whether God will recognize and honor that authority.

The Fifth Article of Faith reads:

We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands, by those who are in authority to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

In this Article of Faith lies a significant evidence of the truth of the gospel. I am interested in the word *must*: “We believe that a man *must* be called of God.” You know, we do not ordinarily use that word in the Church. I question whether there has ever been a stake president receive a directive from the brethren saying, “You are hereby ordered and directed that

you must do such and such.” Rather, I think the spirit of the communication would be, “After consideration it is suggested that ...“ which, of course, by interpretation, means ...

Unfortunately many of us will read it as it is written, but we act as though it read something like this:

We believe in some circumstances, not usually, inadvertently perhaps, there may have been some inspiration with reference to the call of some men to office, possibly maybe to the higher offices of the Church, but ordinarily it is the natural thought processes leading to the appointment of the officials of the Church.

This position seems to be supported in the minds of those who are looking for weaknesses when they see the humanity in the leadership of the Church—bishops, stake presidents, and General Authorities. They sometimes notice haphazard and occasionally inadequate demonstrations of leadership and seize upon these as evidence that the human element predominates.

Others among us are willing to sustain part of the leadership of the Church and question and criticize others of us.

Some of us suppose that if we were called to a high office in the Church immediately we would be loyal, and would show the dedication necessary. We would step forward and valiantly commit ourselves to this service.

But, you can put it down in your little black book that if you will not be loyal in the small things you will not be loyal in the large things. If you will not respond to the so-called insignificant or menial tasks which need to be performed in the Church and Kingdom, there will be no opportunity for service in the so-called greater challenges.

A man who says he will sustain the President of the Church or the General Authorities, but cannot sustain his own bishop is deceiving himself. The man who will not sustain the bishop of his ward and the president of his stake will not sustain the President of the Church.

I have learned from experience that those people who come to us for counsel saying they cannot go to their bishops, are unwilling to accept counsel from their bishops. They are unwilling or unable to accept counsel from the General Authorities. Actually, the inspiration of the Lord will come to their bishop and he can counsel them correctly.

Oh, how frustrating it is, my brethren and sisters, when some members of the Church come to us for counsel. One may receive an impression—an inspiration, if you will—as to what they should do. They listen, and then we see them turn aside from that counsel in favor of some desire of their own that will certainly lead them astray.

Some of us are very jealous of our prerogatives and feel that obedience to priesthood authority is to forfeit one’s agency. If we only knew, my brethren and sisters, that it is through

obedience that we gain freedom.

No one loves freedom more than the holder of the priesthood. President John Taylor spoke very vigorously on this subject:

I was not born a slave! I cannot, will not be a slave. I would not be a slave to God! I would be His servant, friend, His son. I would go at His behest; but would not be His slave. I would rather be extinct than be a slave. His friend I feel I am, and He is mine: —a slave! The manacles would pierce my very bones—the clanking chains would grate against my soul—a poor, lost, servile, crawling wretch, to lick the dust and fawn and smile upon the thing who gave the lash! . . . But stop! I am God’s free man I will not, cannot be a slave! (Oil for Their Lamps, p. 73)

The Lord said:

If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;
And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32)

It is not an easy thing to be amenable always to priesthood authority. I recite the experience of the founder of this University, Dr. Karl G. Maeser. He had been the headmaster of a school in Dresden—a man of distinction, a man of high station. In 1856, Brother Maeser and his wife and small son, together with a Brother Schoenfeld and several other converts, left Germany bound for Zion.

When they arrived in England Brother Maeser was surprised to be called on a mission in England. Much to their disappointment the families were separated and the Schoenfelds continued on to America. While the Maesers remained in England to fill the call from the Church Authorities, the proud professor was often required to perform menial tasks to which in his former station he had never stooped.

It was customary among the higher German people that a man of Brother Maeser’s standing never should be seen on the street carrying packages, but when the elders were going to the train they told him to bring their carpet bags. Brother Maeser paced the floor of his room, his pride deeply hurt. The idea of carrying the suitcases was almost more than he could stand and his wife was also deeply hurt and upset to think that he had to do so.

Finally he said, “Well, they hold the priesthood; they have told me to go, and I will go.” He surrendered his pride and carried the bags.

Now I add this does not represent the surrender of his agency. Brother Maeser for all of his obedience was very vigorous in the expression of his feelings. Another incident will illustrate.

During his labors in England he met a very wealthy and well-educated man who became very much interested and

impressed with Brother Maeser and invited him to bring some of the missionaries to have dinner with him at the hotel. The table manners of the elders were so annoying to Brother Maeser that he said later: "I will go through poverty, I will suffer persecution, I will go to hell with the elders, but I will not go to dinner with them again."

While the men who preside over you in the wards and stakes of the Church may seem like very ordinary men, there is something extraordinary about them. It is the mantle of priesthood authority and the inspiration of the call which they have answered.

I wish you could accompany the General Authorities some time on an assignment to reorganize a stake. It has been my experience on a number of occasions to assist in these reorganizations. It never fails to be a remarkable experience. Some time ago, late one Sunday night, returning after the reorganization of a stake with Elder Marion G. Romney, we were riding along silently, too weary I suppose to be interested in conversation, when he said, "Boyd, this gospel is true!" (An interesting statement from a member of the Twelve.) And then he added, "You couldn't go through what we have been through in the last forty-eight hours without knowing that for sure."

I then rehearsed in my mind the events of the previous hours; the interviews we had held, the decisions made. We had interviewed the priesthood leadership of the stake and invited each of them to make suggestions with reference to a new stake president. Virtually all of them mentioned the same man. They indicated him to be an ideal man for a stake president with appropriate experience, a fine family, sensible and sound, worthy in every way. Near the end of our interviewing, with just two or three left, we interviewed this man and we found him equal to all of the estimates that had been made of him during the day. As he left the room at the conclusion of the interview, Brother Romney said, "Well, what do you think?"

I answered that it was my feeling that we had not seen the new president yet.

This confirmed the feelings of Brother Romney who then said, "Perhaps we should get some more men in here. It may be that the new president is not among the present priesthood leadership of the stake." Then he said, "But suppose we interview the remaining few before we take that course."

There was another interview held, as ordinary as all of the others had been during the day—the same questions, same answers—but at the conclusion of this interview, Brother Romney said, "Well, now how do you feel?"

"As far as I am concerned, I said, "we can quit interviewing." Again this confirmed Brother Romney, for the feeling had come that this was the man that the Lord had set His hand upon to preside over that stake.

Now, how did we know? Because we knew, both of us—together, at once, without any doubt. In reality our assignment was not to *choose* a stake president, but rather to *find* the man that the Lord had chosen. The Lord speaks in an unmistakable way. *Men are called by prophecy.*

It is in the way we answer the call that we show the measure of our devotion.

The faith of the members of the Church in the earlier days was tested many, many times. In a Conference Report for 1856, we find the following. Heber C. Kimball, a counselor in the First Presidency, is speaking:

I will present to this congregation the names of those whom we have selected to go on missions. Some are appointed to go to Europe, Australia, and the East Indies. And several will be sent to Las Vegas, to the north, and to Fort Supply, to strengthen the settlements there.

Such announcements often came as a complete surprise to members of the Church sitting in the audience. Because of their faith, I suppose the only question they had on their minds in response to such a call was "When?" "When shall we go?" I am not so sure but that a similar call made today would call forth the response from many among us, not "When?" but "Why?" "Why should I go?"

On one occasion I was in the office of President Henry D. Moyle when a phone call he had placed earlier in the day came through. After greeting the caller, he said, "I wonder if your business affairs would bring you into Salt Lake City sometime in the near future? I would like to meet with you and your wife, for I have a matter of some importance that I would like to discuss with you."

Well, though it was many miles away, that man all of a sudden discovered that his business would bring him to Salt Lake City the very next morning. I was in the same office the following day when President Moyle announced to this man that he had been called to preside over one of the missions of the Church. "Now," he said, "we don't want to rush you into this decision. Would you call me in a day or two, as soon as you are able to make a determination as to your feelings concerning this call?"

The man looked at his wife and she looked at him, and without saying a word there was that silent conversation between husband and wife, and that gentle almost imperceptible nod. He turned back to President Moyle and said, "Well, President, what is there to say. What could we tell you in a few days that we couldn't tell you now? We have been called. What answer is there? Of course we will respond to the call."

Then President Moyle said rather gently, "Well, if you feel that way about it, actually there is some urgency about this matter. I wonder if you could be prepared to leave by ship

from the West Coast on the 13th of March.”

The man gulped, for that was just eleven days away. He glanced at his wife. There was another silent conversation, and he said, “Yes, President, we can meet that appointment.”

“What about your business?” said the President. “What about your grain elevator? What about your livestock? What about your other holdings?”

“I don’t know,” said the man, “but we will make arrangements somehow. All of those things will be all right.”

Such is the great miracle that we see repeated over and over, day after day, among the faithful. And yet there are many among us who have not the faith to respond to the call or to sustain those who have been so called.

There are some specific things that you can do. Search your soul. How do you regard the leadership of the Church? Do you sustain your bishop? Do you sustain your stake president and the General Authorities of the Church? Or are you among those who are neutral, or critical, who speak evilly, or who refuse calls? Better ask, “Lord, is it I?”

Avoid being critical of those serving in responsible priesthood callings. Show yourself to be loyal. Cultivate the disposition to sustain and to bless. Pray. Pray continually for your leaders.

Never say “No” to an opportunity to serve in the Church. If you are called to an assignment by one who has authority, there is but one answer. It is, of course, expected that you set forth clearly what your circumstances are, but any assignment that comes under call from your bishop or your stake president is a call that comes from the Lord. An article of our faith defines it so, and I bear witness that it is so.

Once called to such positions, do not presume to set your own date of release. A release is in effect another call. Men do not call themselves to offices in the Church. Why must we presume that we have the authority to release ourselves? A release should come by the same authority from whence came the call.

Act in the office to which you are called with all diligence. Do not be a slothful servant. Be punctual and dependable and faithful.

You have the right to know concerning calls that come to you. Be humble and reverent and prayerful concerning responsibilities that are placed upon your shoulders. Keep those standards of worthiness so that the Lord can communicate with you concerning the responsibilities that are yours in the call that you have answered.

The Lord has said:

Wherefore, lift up your hearts and rejoice, and gird up your loins, and take upon you my whole armor, that ye may be able to withstand the evil day, having done all,

that ye may be able to stand.

Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, which I have sent mine angels to commit unto you;

Taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of my Spirit, which I will pour out upon you, and my word which I reveal unto you, and be agreed as touching all things whatsoever ye ask of me, and be faithful until I come, and ye shall be caught up, that where I am ye shall be also. (D&C 27:15-18.)

In closing, I say again, *FOLLOW THE BRETHREN*. In a few days there opens another general conference of the Church. The servants of the Lord will counsel us. You may listen with anxious ears and hearts, or you may turn that counsel aside. As in these devotionals, what you shall gain will depend not so much upon their preparation of the messages as upon your preparation for them.

Remember the verses from the Doctrine and Covenants 1:38-39:

What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.

Returning again to Karl G. Maeser, on one occasion he was leading a party of young missionaries across the Alps. As they slowly ascended the steep slope, he looked back and saw a row of sticks thrust into the glacial snow to mark the one safe path across the otherwise treacherous mountains.

Something about those sticks impressed him, and halting the company of missionaries he gestured toward them and said, “Brethren, there stands the priesthood. They are just common sticks like the rest of us—some of them may even seem to be a little crooked, but the position they hold makes them what they are. If we step aside from the path they mark, we are lost.”

I bear witness, my brethren and sisters, fellow students, that in this Church men are as they indeed must be—called of God by prophecy. May we learn in our youth this lesson; it will see us faithful through all of the challenges of our lives. May we learn to follow the brethren, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. (Boyd K. Packer, “Follow the Brethren,” *Speeches of the Year*, BYU, 23 March 1965, pp. 1- 10.)