

How Does the Story of David's Loyalty to Saul Apply in Our Day?

An Old Testament KnoWhy¹ relating to the reading assignment for Gospel Doctrine Lesson 22: "The Lord Be Between Thee and Me Forever" (1 Samuel 18-20; 23-24) (JBOTL23A)



Figure 1. David cuts off a part of Saul's cloak

Question: How does the story of David's loyalty to Saul apply in our day?

Summary: The story of David's rise to power² "is designed to demonstrate David's innocence of wrongdoing in his conflict with the house of Saul and to explain his dramatic ascent to the throne as a consequence of divine favor."³ His self-restraint in the face of both Saul's murderous intentions and his own anointing to become king "shows his respect for God's appointment of Saul and his patience to wait for God's timing."⁴ David never speaks of Saul as his enemy, and his declaration to Saul after he cuts off a part of the old king's cloak make it clear that "what David wanted was not to harm Saul but to demonstrate his own loyalty."⁵ Though it is unlikely that any of us will encounter the sort of challenges faced by David in his relationship with Saul, his story serves as a reminder of the attitude of love and respect that should be maintained with regard to "the Lord's anointed."⁶ It is hoped that the suggestions collected in the discourse below will be a helpful resource for members who seek to resolve differences with Church leaders in the Lord's way.

“For He Is the Lord’s Anointed”⁷

“I will not put forth mine hand against... the Lord’s anointed”⁸

In the book of 1 Samuel, we read the story of Saul, who as a young man had been chosen and anointed by the prophet Samuel to be king. Sadly, he became proud and disobedient to the degree that he was no longer fit to lead Israel. After the Lord directed Samuel to anoint David as his successor, Saul was enraged with jealousy. Though David never expressed a word of disloyalty to his king, Saul organized a band of three thousand of his best men in a military campaign to take his life.

One day Saul left his men outside and entered a cave where, unbeknownst to him, David and his men were hiding. Ignoring his men’s urging to take advantage of the circumstance to kill the king, David instead rose up and stealthily cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe with his sword. Immediately afterward, however, “David’s heart smote him,”⁹ for he realized that in his act he had perpetrated a kind of symbolic mutilation of the king — in effect “cutting away” Saul’s kingship.¹⁰ David held back his eager men and let the king depart unharmed. Then, we are told:¹¹

David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself.

And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men’s words saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?

Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee to day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord’s anointed.

Despite Saul’s unrighteousness, his lack of fitness for kingship, and even his persistent threats against the life of David, David continued to respect the position of the king.¹² In spite of what others saw as unbearable provocations, he refused to lift up his hand against Saul so long as the Lord permitted him to continue in his prophetically appointed office.¹³

“He That Receiveth My Servants Receiveth Me”¹⁴

Members of the Church today are bound by a strict injunction to refrain from criticizing, fault finding, belittling, and murmuring against the Lord’s anointed.¹⁵ And who are the Lord’s anointed? Any leader who, by virtue of holding priesthood keys or possessing specifically delegated authority given by one who possesses such keys, has been duly ordained, set apart, or assigned to carry out a responsibility to represent the Lord in some area of stewardship. So important is

this principle, that the Lord pointedly reiterated it as part of the oath and covenant of the priesthood in section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In this formulation, receiving the Lord's servants and His priesthood is equated explicitly to receiving the Lord Himself:¹⁶

And also all they
 who receive this priesthood
 receive me,
 saith the Lord;
For he
 that receiveth my servants
 receiveth me;

Conversely, he who rejects the Lord's servants and His priesthood rejects the Lord Himself. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught that this principle applies not merely to General and Area Authorities but also to local leadership: "The man who will not sustain the bishop of his ward and the president of his stake will not sustain [— or, we might also say, *does not* sustain —] the President of the Church."¹⁷

Of course, even a righteous individual is not a perfect individual. Every righteous individual in this world will have certain aspects of his personality that are less-than-desirable.¹⁸ As Brother Richard L. Bushman observed: "I am not sure it is absolutely necessary that [even a prophet be] an admirable character. God can no doubt reveal his will to a perfect bear of a man."¹⁹

The essential requirement of those who lead is to live the basic standards of worthiness that pertain to the stewardship to which he or she has been given. That worthiness is to be assessed by *his* or *her* priesthood leaders, not by the rest of us. If Church leaders are found by their leaders to be living according to the basic criteria of worthiness required for a particular stewardship, regardless of any other strengths or limitations they may or may not have, they are fit to receive the revelation from the Lord necessary to properly exercise their functions and we are duty bound to sustain their actions by our words, our prayers, and our actions so long as that stewardship is theirs.

In Doctrine and Covenants 121:16-22, the Lord is very plain about the consequences that await those who fail to receive the Lord's anointed as they would receive the Lord Himself:

Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them.

But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves. And those who swear falsely against my servants, that they might bring them into bondage and

death —wo unto them; because they have offended my little ones they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house.

Their basket shall not be full, their houses and their barns shall perish, and they themselves shall be despised by those that flattered them. They shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation. It had been better for them that a millstone had been hanged about their necks, and they drowned in the depth of the sea.

Raising Concerns in Church Vs. Secular Settings

Of course, none of this is to say that differences with Church leaders should not be expressed as they inevitably arise. However Elder Spencer J. Condie explains why such differences should be handled differently than if we were concerned with the conduct of officials in secular organizations:20

Government or corporate officials, who are directly or indirectly elected or appointed by majority vote, must expect that their performance will be subject to critical and public evaluations by their constituents. ...

A different principle applies in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where the selection of leaders is based on revelation, subject to the sustaining vote of the membership. In our system of church government, evil-speaking or criticism of leaders by members is always negative. As President George F. Richards of the Council of the Twelve said in a conference address in April 1947: “When we say anything bad about the leaders of the Church, whether true or false, we tend to impair their influence and their usefulness and are thus working against the Lord and his cause.” (p. 24) This is why the Holy Ghost will not guide or confirm criticism of the Lord’s anointed or of church leaders, local or general. This is why we are commanded and counseled to refrain from criticism of church leaders. It is for our own spiritual well-being.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell gave a similar warning in these terms:21

Some... patiently feed their pet peeve about the Church without realizing that such a pet will not only bite the hands of him who feeds it, but will swallow his whole soul.

President Brigham Young, in his characteristic manner, put the matter even more bluntly:22

[You cannot] destroy the appointment of a Prophet of God, [you can] only destroy [your] own authority, cut the thread that [binds you] to the Prophet and to God, and sink [yourselves] to hell.

Continues Elder Condie:23

Contrary to what some have said, the teachings against criticism of church leaders are not an assertion of infallibility, a claim of right to unchallenged wrongdoing, or a bid for blind obedience by church members. ... [W]e can communicate our differences with church leaders. But it must be done in the Lord's way.

Handling Differences in the Lord's Way

How then is communication of differences to be done? President Dallin H. Oaks has given the following counsel:²⁴

The first principle in the gospel procedure for managing differences is to keep our personal differences private and not allow them to be a source of contention. ... In this we have worthy examples to follow. Every student of church history knows that there have been differences of opinion among church leaders since the Church was organized. Each of us has experienced such differences in our own work in the auxiliaries, quorums, wards, stakes, and missions of the Church. We know that such differences are discussed, but they are not discussed in public and they are not pursued in a spirit of contention. Counselors acquiesce in the decisions of their president. Teachers follow the direction of their presidency. Members are loyal to the counsel of their bishop. All of this is done quietly and loyally, even by members who would have adopted a different policy or pursued a different procedure if they had been in the position of authority. ...

[If we feel we must talk to the someone, we should] communicate our differences privately to the leader involved. The Savior taught: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."²⁵ This course of action may be pursued in a private meeting, if possible, or it may be done through a letter or other indirect communication.

How many differences could be resolved if we would only communicate privately about them! Private communications would remove many obstacles to individual growth and correction. Private communication of differences also removes the inference (present in some public criticism) that the critic is seeking personal aggrandizement rather than public benefit. Some differences would disappear when private communications identified them as mere misunderstandings. Other differences would be postponed with an agreement to disagree for the present.

The Value of Loyal Counselors and Councils

Fortunately, in my experience, the need even for private discussion of differences is generally rare. This is because, in addition to the personal right to inspiration

and guidance from the Holy Ghost, every Church leader is blessed with a set of counselors. Writes Elder Condie about the function of these advisers:26

A counselor who is truly loyal will carefully warn his or her leader about pitfalls ahead or alert the leader to wonderful opportunities which lie in the future. There is great strength in the presidency principle. Three people take much longer to make a decision than one person acting alone; however, two counselors provide an excellent error-correction function. ...

[T]here is a marvelous, wonderful power in unanimous decisions in which individuals with strong personal preferences are given the opportunity to freely express their preferences but who then humbly abide by the will of the entire quorum, presidency, or council. It is at the time of the decision that our loyalty must remain to one another, to our leaders, and to our group decision.

When a stake presidency and high council discuss a matter and arrive at a decision, it is not only very disloyal but extremely disruptive to the work of the kingdom when one or two high councilors spread the word around the stake that “Brother Johnson and I opposed the decision, but the rest of them voted for it.” This kind of disloyalty undermines the power and authority of the stake presidency and the other high councilors and does nothing to enhance the esteem in which the two public dissidents are held in the eyes of the members.

... [I]f it seems that a consensus is not immediately reachable, it may be well to postpone the issue for another week or two and give it more prayerful deliberation. But under no circumstances should a counselor tell his wife or other members of the ward, “I told the bishop it was a bad decision, but he wouldn’t listen to me.” To do so is to follow the folly of Oliver Cowdery, Frederick G. Williams, Sidney Rigdon, and William Law, who were more concerned about governing the kingdom “my way” rather than the Lord’s way.

Faith and Keys in Stake Leadership

Now I would like to talk more specifically about administration of Church affairs at the stake level. At the first Worldwide Leadership Training Broadcast in 2003, President Boyd K. Packer described how “the principle of presidency is outlined in the scriptures”:27

The First Presidency was organized with the President, who holds all the keys, and a First and a Second Counselor, together with the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who also hold the keys. ... This pattern of a president, who has keys conferred upon him, and a first and second counselor, is duplicated in every stake. ... It is duplicated in auxiliaries. However, presidents of auxiliaries do not hold priesthood keys. [Note: This is why

members of the bishopric rather than young men and young women presidencies have the primary Church responsibility for 12-18 year-old boys and girls — they hold the keys the requisite keys to direct this work.]

Each stake is independent from every other stake. The president holds the keys. ... With his counselors, they form a presidency. With the high council and other officers, they govern the stake. The stake presidency has authority to call, to release, to organize, to teach, to correct, according to the established pattern and as directed by the General Authorities who preside over them.

The established pattern that President Packer refers to is found in the scriptures, in the *Church Handbook of Instructions*, and in frequent online updates to previous instructions. Specific direction for leaders serving in a particular location comes from General and Area Authorities comes during regular training and council meetings and by other times and means on an as-needed basis. Every leader needs not only to be familiar with published and online instructions, but also to attend training meetings and councils where he or she can benefit from the ongoing revelation that governs this living church. President Hinckley emphasized the importance of continual learning from these sources:28

Every leader must keep current. He must read. He must study. In the Church he must know the scriptures and the handbook. He must read the bulletins. He must keep his eye fixed on new developments. If he does not he will soon find himself lagging behind and the work will suffer.

Last August [2004], the burden of authority and responsibility on the shoulders of stake presidencies was increased. Due to important changes in leadership structure made at that time, stake presidents in the mature stakes of the United States and Canada are now expected to solve many more of their own problems. At one of the first conference calls after the change, our stake president related that another stake president had asked a question of Elder D. Todd Christofferson, the member of the Presidency of the Seventy assigned to supervise our area. The stake president wanted to know how often Elder Christofferson expected to hear from him about questions and concerns. “Once or twice in the next eight or nine years should be about right,” Elder Christofferson replied. “What kinds of concerns should we bring to you for counsel?” “I can’t really think of anything.”

Fortunately, stake presidents — and all Church leaders — have access to yet another source of help. After listing all the written sources of help for leaders, and reminding them of their need to follow the counsel of their file leaders, President Packer quoted D&C 46:2:29

...notwithstanding those things which are written, it always has been given to the elders of my church from the beginning, and ever shall be, to conduct all meetings as they are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit. ...

Always, always follow the promptings of the Spirit [concluded President Packer].

President Packer explained how printed directions from Church leaders and specific inspiration to priesthood leaders go hand in hand:30

There are principles of the Gospel underlying every phase of Church administration. ... They are found in the scriptures. They are the substance of and the purpose for the revelations.

Procedures, programs, the administrative policies, even some patterns of organization are subject to change. We are quite free, indeed, quite obliged to alter them from time to time. But the principles, the doctrines, never change. If you over-emphasize programs and procedures that can change, and will change, and must change, and do not understand the fundamental principles of the gospel, which never change, you can be misled.

Now, listen carefully. I do not imply that you should ignore the handbooks or manuals, not for one minute would I say that. What I do say is this: there is a spiritual ingredient not found in handbooks that you must include in your ministry if you are to please the Lord. When you know the Gospel, you will have a loyalty toward the instruction in the handbooks that you cannot have otherwise. By so doing, you will save yourself the innovations that cannot work.

Stake presidencies governs the work of the Melchizedek Priesthood throughout their stakes with the help of the members of councils composed both of men and women. The importance of drawing on the inspiration and resources of sisters within these councils cannot be overemphasized. In 1993, Elder M. Russell Ballard encouraged priesthood leaders who had been negligent in this respect:31

Brethren, please be sure you are seeking the vital input of the sisters in your council meetings. Encourage all council members to share their suggestions and ideas about how the stake or ward can be more effective in proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the Saints, and redeeming the dead.

In the specific work of training priesthood leaders, high council members have a particular stewardship, Elder L. Tom Perry explained:32

In each ward is an elders quorum ... The stake president's prime responsibility is to teach and train priesthood leaders so that they will understand their duty and act in the office to which they have been called... "in all diligence."33 ... [High councilors] carry the message out to the wards and the quorums in the stake... The stake president has a right

to hold [them] accountable to see that the quorums are properly functioning in the ward to which [they have] been assigned.

Sometimes members misunderstand these principles, and wonder why stake leaders want to interfere in the details of “their” ward Melchizedek Priesthood affairs. Members may also sometimes erroneously believe that the Church is governed by handbooks rather than by the living servants of God who hold the keys of the priesthood. As President Henry B. Eyring has taught, such brethren need to better understand the nature of priesthood “keys and the faith [in them] that unlocks their power.”³⁴

I visited a ward where a stake-supported activity was explained. I could tell that my comments had made one of the members unhappy, so after the meeting I walked up to the brother to learn more about his feelings. He told me that not only was the course of action unwise, but also that it contradicted the instructions in the handbook. I explained that the stake president had reviewed the handbook in making his decision. I said I hoped that the brother would participate in the activity and help make it successful, but he walked away resentfully, saying that he would never take part in anything that was contrary to the written instructions. This brother did not understand that inspired written instructions given by the Brethren for the benefit of Church membership — like all scripture — are not amenable to “private interpretation” but rather are applied according to the understanding of those who have been appointed to make such determinations “as they [are] moved by the Holy Ghost.”³⁵

In another ward, a brother approached me to ask whether there wasn’t an easier way for him to deal with a personal challenge than in the way his bishop and stake president had advised. I knew something the magnitude of the difficulties this brother faced, and had great sympathy and love for him. When I told him that my counsel was to follow the direction that his leaders had given him and that I would do what I could to help him, he broke into tears and said it was too hard, that he couldn’t do it. It broke my heart to see that this brother had had enough faith to ask his leaders but sadly lacked the faith to follow them. It was unto such that the Lord addressed Himself when He said, “... why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? ³⁶

All of us have been challenged by the lofty goals for the stake that our stake president has approved for the coming year. We may ask ourselves, “Are these objectives really reasonable?”³⁷ This makes me think of the phrase that Robert F. Kennedy made famous during his 85-day campaign for president: “Some men see things as they are, and ask ‘Why?’ I dream of things that never were, and ask ‘Why not?’”³⁸ Nephi could have well challenged the Lord about the unreasonable things he was asked to do, but he did not — for he was too busy exercising his faith to build the ship.³⁹

President Packer has written about the kind of faith that it takes to transform a challenging and inspired goal into reality:⁴⁰

There is [a] kind of faith, rare indeed. This is the kind of faith that *causes* things to happen. It is the kind of faith that is worthy and prepared and unyielding, and it calls forth things that otherwise would not be. It is the kind of faith that moves people. It is the kind of faith that sometimes moves things. Few men possess it. It comes by gradual growth. It is a marvelous, even a transcendent, power, a power as real and as invisible as electricity. Directed and channeled, it has great effect.

That great effect is described by President Eyring:⁴¹

If enough of us exercise that faith and receive... assurances [that the keys of authority held by the priesthood are real], God will lift up those who lead us and so bless our lives and our families.

The Need to Deal With Differences Promptly

In closing, I want to address with urgency any who are currently feeling the slightest degree of disharmony with their ward, stake, or general leaders. It is not just a matter of getting our actions and tongues in line, we must immediately purge ourselves of the least tendency to harbor criticism or condescension in the thoughts and feelings of our heart. Brigham Young related the following about the need to deal promptly with any lack of confidence we may feel in our leaders:⁴²

It is folly in the extreme for persons to say that... they have confidence in God, when they have none in righteous men, for they do not know anything about God... [O]nce in my life I felt a want of confidence in brother Joseph Smith... A feeling came over me that Joseph was not right in his financial management, though I presume the feeling did not last sixty seconds, and perhaps not thirty. ... It gave me sorrow of heart, and I clearly saw and understood, by the spirit of revelation manifested to me, that if I was to harbor a thought in my heart that Joseph could be wrong in anything, I would begin to lose confidence in him, and that feeling would grow from step to step, and from one degree to another, until at last I would have the same lack of confidence in his being the mouthpiece for the Almighty. ...

I repented of my unbelief, and that too, very suddenly; I repented about as quickly as I committed the error. ... It was not my prerogative to call him in question with regard to any act of his life. He was God's servant and not mine. He did not belong to the people but to the Lord.

In a humorous vein, Elder J. Golden Kimball once is purported to have said that some leaders are sent to lead us while others are called to try us.⁴³ Such a trial came into the life of Marion G. Romney, a former member of the First Presidency.⁴⁴

Elder Romney ... had ... run for public office and was quite aware that his election hung on the coattails of the national election. The president of the United States at the time was Franklin D. Roosevelt, who, in the language of the journalists, had “packed the Supreme Court” with his supporters. There was a four-column, front-page editorial in the *Deseret News*, a newspaper owned by the Church, that blasted this move by President Roosevelt.

When Brother Romney read the column he knew that, as a Democrat, his chances of being elected were over. He described his turmoil as he went to bed that night. He prayed, “O Lord, I feel all right about it and I’m going to sleep now.” Then he got into bed and thoughts started going through his mind: “Why can’t the Church lay off matters political? Why do they have to turn these issues into moral issues? Why ...” He got more and more upset, so he got out of bed and prayed again: “Father in Heaven, I want you to forgive the Brethren if there’s anything here amiss, and I want you to forgive me for my feelings, but ...” This debate with himself went on all night.

The next day as he walked down Main Street he saw Elder [Harold B.] Lee. “Good morning, Brother Romney.”

“Good morning.”

“How are you, Brother Romney?”

He gave the standard answer: “Fine.”

“Did you read the paper last night, Brother Romney?”

“Yes, I did, Brother Lee.”

“Well, what did you think?”

“Well, Brother Lee, I’ve had a bad night, but I’m determined to sustain the Brethren.”

Later, President Lee recorded the feelings of Elder Romney in more detail and drew an important lesson:⁴⁵

“When I read that editorial,” [Elder Romney] told me, “I knew what I should do — but that wasn’t enough. I knew that I must feel right about following the counsel of the Church leaders and know that they were right. That took a whole night on my knees to accomplish.” I submit in that statement the difference between “intelligent” and “blind” obedience.⁴⁶

Marion G. Romney, while never disloyal to authority over him, could never be rightfully accused of being “blindly obedient.”

I have a personal testimony of this principle. I know with all my heart that this is the Lord’s Church, and is led by Him. I do not wish to be an ark steedier for I believe, as the Lord expressed through Nephi, “[He] is able to do [His] own work.”⁴⁷ My feelings are just as those expressed by Brigham Young and Jedediah Grant as follows:

Let the kingdom alone, the Lord steadies the ark; and if it does jostle, and appear to need steadying, if the way is a little sideling sometimes, and to all appearance threatens its overthrow, be careful how you stretch forth your hands to steady it; let us not be too officious in meddling with that which does not concern us; let it alone, it is the Lord's work. I know enough to let the kingdom alone, and do my duty. It carries me, I do not carry the kingdom. I sail in the old ship Zion, and it bears me safely above the raging elements.⁴⁸

The ship is all oak, let her slide. If we are in snag harbor, all right; we will steer the ship, and run around the snag, or over it, just as the Lord pleases. Jesus, our elder brother, is at the helm, and has a good crew aboard, who are faithful, meek, and humble.⁴⁹

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Endnotes

1 Used with permission of Book of Mormon Central. See <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/reference-knowhy>.

2 1 Samuel 16:14-2 Samuel 5:10.

3 H. W. Attridge *et al.*, HarperCollins Study Bible, Kindle Edition, Locations 23349-23351.

4 L. T. Dennis *et al.*, ESV, p. 530.

5 G. Auld, in J. D. G. Dunn *et al.*, Eerdmans Commentary, p. 226.

6 1 Samuel 24:6.

7 Adapted from a Discourse at a Pensacola Florida Stake Leadership Meeting

8 January 2005.

8 1 Samuel 24:10.

9 1 Samuel 24:5.

10 R. Alter, David, p. 148.

11 1 Samuel 24:8-10.

12 With respect to the importance of one's "position," President Boyd K. Packer told the following story (A. P. Burton, Maeser, p. 22; B. K. Packer, Position, p. 51):

On one occasion [Brother Karl G. Maeser, the first president of BYU,] was going with a group of young missionaries across the Alps. They were crossing a high mountain pass on foot. There were long sticks stuck into the snow of the glacier to mark the path so that travelers could find their way safely across the glacier and down the mountain on the other side.

When they reached the summit, Brother Maeser wanted to teach the young elders a lesson. He stopped at the pinnacle of the mountain and pointed to those sticks that they had followed. And he said, "Brethren, behold the priesthood of God. They are just common old sticks, but it's the position that counts. Follow them and you will surely be safe. Stray from them and you will surely be lost." And so it is in the Church. We are called to leadership positions and given the power of the priesthood. And we are just common old sticks, but the position we are given counts. It is separate and apart from us, but while we hold it, we hold it.

Now in our wards and in our branches and in our stakes, the Lord calls to positions of leadership the brethren who are there. None of them is perfect. But they hold the office, and we are to be obedient to them.... [They] might just be a common old stick, but it [is] the position that counts.

13 A story from the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith illustrates his respect for priesthood direction. Exhausted from the flight from threats in Kirtland, unsuccessful in seeking for a job at cutting and sawing wood, and now destitute of money to continue his journey to Far West, Missouri, the Prophet came to Brigham Young for advice (J. Smith, Jr., Documentary History, on or about 16 January 1838, 3:2):

"You are one of the Twelve who have charge of the kingdom in all the world; I believe I shall throw myself upon you, and look to you for counsel in this case." Writes Joseph: "Brother Young thought I was not earnest, but I told him I was. Brother Brigham then said, 'If you will take my counsel it will be that you rest yourself, and be assured you shall have money in plenty to pursue your journey.'" There was a brother living in the place who had tried

for some time to sell his farm but could not; he asked counsel of Brother Young concerning his property; Brother Young told him that if he would do right, and obey counsel, he should have an opportunity to sell.

In about three days Brother Tomlinson came to Brother Brigham and said he had an offer for his place; Brother Brigham told him that this was the manifestation of the hand of the Lord to deliver Brother Joseph Smith from his present necessities. “Brother Brigham’s promise was soon verified, and I got three hundred dollars from Brother Tomlinson, which enabled me to pursue my journey.”

14 D&C 84:36.

15 See H. W. Nibley, *Criticizing*.

16 D&C 84:35-36.

17 B. K. Packer, *Follow*, see also D&C 1:38.

18 In speaking of the human imperfections of Brigham Young, Elder Moses Thatcher poetically compared such blemishes to sunspots, and mused about whether “such spots on the face of our brilliant star are not beneficial to man in his temporal state, since we cannot bear the sun’s full light and heat even such as it is” (B. H. Stuy, *Discourses*, 1 June 1889, 1:284).

19 R. L. Bushman, *Character*, p. 32.

20 S. J. Condie, *Balance*.

21 N. A. Maxwell, *All Hell*, p. 57. Also cited in N. A. Maxwell, *Quote*, p. 71.

22 . *Deseret News Weekly*, 10 February 1858, p. 386, cited in, e.g., L. J. Arrington, *Brigham Young*, p. 57; B. Young, *Teachings 1997*, p. 79; H. B. Lee, *Light, Let us be as one*, p. 52.

President Young’s statement was made in the context of the apostasy in Kirtland that followed the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society (S. E. McCloud, *Young*, pp. 59-60):

One particularly dark day in early January 1837, when Joseph was out of the city, many of the Twelve and other Church leaders — even those men who had been special witnesses to the Book of Mormon — gathered for a council in the upper room of the temple. The purpose of their meeting: how to depose the Prophet Joseph Smith. Brigham states that “Father John Smith, brother Heber C. Kimball and others were present, who were opposed to such measures.”

He also gives a thrilling and graphic account of what took place: “I rose up, and in a plain and forcible manner told them that Joseph was a Prophet, and I knew it, and that they might rail and slander him as much as they pleased, that they could not destroy the appointment of the Prophet of God, they could only destroy their own authority, cut the thread that bound them to the Prophet and to God, and sink themselves to hell. ... This was a crisis when earth and hell seemed leagued to overthrow the Prophet and the Church of God. The knees of many of the strongest men in the Church faltered.” But Brigham’s never did.

Though his life was truly in danger, though he was plagued and despised by those who had before been his friends, he had set his course and would not deviate from it: “During this siege of darkness I stood close by Joseph, and, with all the wisdom and power God bestowed upon me, put forth my utmost energies to sustain the servant of God and unite the Quorums of the Church.”

President Henry B. Eyring has written (H. B. Eyring, *Keys*, p. 28}):

Satan will always work on the Saints of God to undermine their faith in priesthood keys. One way he does it is to point out the humanity of those who hold them. He can in that way weaken our testimony and so cut us loose from the line of keys by which the Lord ties us to Him and can take us and our families home to Him and to our Heavenly Father.

Satan succeeded in undermining the testimony of men who had, with Joseph Smith, seen the heavens opened and heard the voices of angels. The evidence of their physical eyes and ears was not enough when they no longer could feel the testimony that the priesthood keys were still in place with Joseph.

The warning for us is plain. If we look for human frailty in humans, we will always find it. When we focus on finding the frailties of those who hold priesthood keys, we run risks for ourselves. When we speak or write to others of such frailties, we put them at risk.

We live in a world where finding fault in others seems to be the favorite blood sport. It has long been the basis of political campaign strategy. It is the theme of much television programming across the world. It sells newspapers.

Whenever we meet anyone, our first, almost unconscious reaction may be to look for imperfections. To keep ourselves grounded in the Lord's Church, we can and must train our eyes to recognize the power of the Lord in the service of those He has called. We must be worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. And we need to pray for the Holy Ghost to help us know that men who lead us hold this power. For me, such prayers are most often answered when I am fully engaged in the Lord's service myself.

23 S. J. Condie, *Balance*.

24 D. H. Oaks, *Lord's Way*, pp. 200-203.

25 Matthew 18:15.

26 S. J. Condie, *Balance*, pp. 207, 210.

27 B. K. Packer, *Restoration*, p. 3.

28 G. B. Hinckley, *Teachings* (1997), p. 311.

29 B. K. Packer, *Restoration*, pp. 2-3. One important reason why such promptings are necessary is that the situation of each church unit is different.

President L. Tom Perry explained (L. T. Perry, *Basic*, pp. 8, 9):

The Brethren recognize that units of the Church are at different stages of development and have different needs. ... The secret in building a branch or a district, a ward or a stake is to know your members, their abilities, and their needs, and to build your program based on the leadership available and the needs of your members.

As J. Golden Kimball is said once to have quipped, “As far as I’m concerned, there are not enough General Authorities to do all the thinking for the membership of the Church” (J. Kimball, *More J. Golden Kimball*, p. 44).

30 B. K. Packer, *Principles*, p. 6.

31 M. R. Ballard, *Strength in Counsel*.

32 L. T. Perry, *Stake*, p. 6.

33 D&C 107:99.

34 H. B. Eyring, *Keys*, p. 28.

35 2 Peter 1:20-21.

36 Luke 6:46.

37 See Helaman 16:18.

38 Kennedy was actually paraphrasing a line written by George Bernard Shaw, the Anglo-Irish playwright and critic: “You see things; and you say ‘Why?’ But I dream things that never were; and I say ‘Why not?’” (from words of the serpent to Eve in G. B. Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*, Act 1, “In the Beginning”).

Kennedy was also fond of a quote written in a similar spirit from Tennyson’s *Ulysses*: “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” (A. L. Tennyson, *Ulysses*).

39 1 Nephi 17-18.

40 B. K. Packer, *Faith*, p. 43. President Packer’s beautiful description of faith also should be cited here (*ibid.*, p. 42):

Faith, to be faith, must center around something that is not known. Faith, to be faith, must go beyond that for which there is confirming evidence. Faith, to be faith, must go into the unknown. Faith, to be faith, must walk to the edge of the light, and then a few steps into the darkness. If everything has to be known, if everything has to be explained, if everything has to be certified, then there is no need for faith. Indeed, there is no room for it.

41 H. B. Eyring, *Keys*, p. 29.

42 JD, 4:297-298.

43 The context of this teaching attributed to Elder Kimball is given by Truman G. Madsen (T. G. Madsen, *Power*, p. 236):

Someone else was also complaining about how difficult it was to follow a certain leader. (You see, it is not just a matter of following the request to give a spectacular amount. What if you are called to give less than you can give? What if you are called not to be called? What if you are told only to wait for a decision and be patient?) In answer to this complaint, J. Golden says the legend, replied, "Well some of them are sent to lead us and some of them are sent to try us." After the laughter and delight of that statement passes, the truth of it becomes apparent. All of us are sent to lead and to try each other. And the priesthood is given to try us to the core because of what it demands of us.

44 T. G. Madsen, *Presidents*, pp. 310-311. In Brother Madsen’s account of this incident, it is specifically characterized as a trial (*ibid.*, pp. 310-311):

In his discourses President [Harold B.] Lee often said that we must face trials in order to prove ourselves. On the day that Elder [Marion G.] Romney was called as an Assistant to the Twelve, President Lee said that he knew there were men sitting on the stand who had been tested to the core and who would not be sitting there unless they had passed such tests. He was speaking of Elder Romney, among others.

45 M. G. Romney, *Look*, Foreword, pp. xi-xii. The full account of this incident as given by President Lee is as follows (*ibid.*, Foreword, pp. xi-xii):

In the political field where so much pressure is exerted on men to compromise ideals and principles for expediency, party workers early learned to admire Marion G. Romney's intense loyalty to his own conscience as well as to the advice of his Church leaders whose pronouncements on vital issues affecting the welfare of the nation he accepted as divinely inspired even though it frequently brought him into sharp conflict with leaders of his own political party.

On one such occasion when Church leaders in a tersely-worded editorial had denounced the trends of the political administration then in power, he confided in me something which it might be well if all loyal Church members in public life could emulate: "When I read that editorial," he told me, "I knew what I should do — but that wasn't enough. I knew that I must feel right about following the counsel of the Church leaders and know that they were right. That took a whole night on my knees to accomplish." I submit in that statement the difference between "intelligent" and "blind" obedience. Marion G. Romney, while never disloyal to authority over him, could never be rightfully accused of being "blindly obedient."

46 President Romney himself emphasized the obligation we have to gain our own testimony of inspired counsel (*ibid.*, *How to know when a prophet is speaking*, p. 79):

We must be able to get for ourselves the witness that [our leaders] speak for the Lord by the power of the Holy Ghost. On this point, President Brigham Young once said: "You may know whether you are led right or wrong, as well as you know the way home; for every principle God has revealed carries its own convictions of its truth to the human mind, and there is no calling of God to man on earth but what brings with it the evidences of its authenticity" (JD, 9:149).

Further on in the same address he cautioned the Saints not to let their confidence in their leaders keep them from inquiring: "... for themselves of God whether they are led by Him, I am fearful they settled down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation, and weaken that influence they could give to their leaders, did they know for themselves, by the revelations of Jesus, that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates or not.... Let all persons be fervent in prayer, until they know the

things of God for themselves and become certain that they are walking in the path that leads to everlasting life” (ibid., 9:150).”

47 2 Nephi 27:20.

48 JD, President Brigham Young, 17 June 1866, 11:252; Elder M. Russell Ballard quoted Brigham Young’s imagery about the old ship Zion in M. R. Ballard, Stay in the Boat; M. R. Ballard, God Is at the Helm.

49 JD, President Jedediah M. Grant, 24 September 1854, 3:69.