



President Cecil O. Samuelson

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# Holy Habits and Righteous Routines

*President Cecil O. Samuelson*

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In June 2006, at the Missionary Training Center during an evening dinner for the new mission presidents, Elder Dallin H. Oaks commented on an excellent talk he had heard given by a stake president in New York whose theme was “Holy Habits and Righteous Routines.” Elder Oaks did not recite any of the substance of the talk, nor have I seen a copy of it. I take on faith that it was as good as was reported.

Since that time, I have thought repeatedly about the notion of holy habits and righteous routines. I have made, and added to, my lists in each category. My purpose today is not to share my lists. Rather, it is to suggest to you the benefit and utility of constructing your own lists or agendas of holy habits and righteous routines. I believe you will find such an exercise beneficial, as have I, if you will then begin to practice what you believe more diligently. Particularly as priesthood leaders with the dual tasks of helping our people develop stronger and deeper faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and doing all we can to strengthen families, I believe it is quite easy to understand the positive benefits of holy habits and righteous routines.

## **Preparing a Faithful People**

At the outset, I wish to commend you brethren for what you are and what you do. In the three and a half years I have lived among you, worked closely with several of you, and have been in more than a few of the stakes represented at this conference, I have been impressed with both your capacities and your devoted and superb service.

Like you, I have high regard for the heroes of the scriptures, and I firmly believe you are in the same class and rank as so many who have served with great devotion and effectiveness in past ages. One of my favorites is Captain Moroni. Although I did not fulfill my military duty during wartime as did President Thomas S. Monson, I was in uniform long enough to appreciate those officers and leaders who were able to inspire and lead with effectiveness. Moroni was one who clearly inspired and led effectively, and he was also an exemplary priesthood leader and teacher. In the midst of his comprehensive military efforts and his concentration on tactics and strategy, the scriptures record that he “had been preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God” (Alma 48:7). That sounds to me exactly like what you, in your various callings, have been assigned to do. We are charged to prepare “the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God.”

Likewise, I believe it would be fair to say that you brethren in the Marriott Center this morning largely merit the same compliments paid to Captain Moroni, and to Helaman, as they lived in very trying times the century before the mortal advent of Jesus Christ. Think of yourselves and of your associates as I read this assessment of Moroni and Helaman: “Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men. Behold, he was a man like unto Ammon, the son of Mosiah, yea, and even the other sons of Mosiah, yea, and also Alma and his sons, for they were all men of God. Now behold, Helaman and his brethren were no less serviceable unto the people than was Moroni” (Alma 48:17–19).

I am a witness that you brethren are serviceable to the people and to God, and I thank you for all you do so well. It is clear to me, as I read both the scriptural account and between the lines as it were, that these great men had both holy habits and righteous routines. May I suggest some potential applications for you to consider in your stewardships.

### **Preserving Order in God’s Kingdom**

Some of you, because of your specific presiding positions, have received or will soon be receiving the new edition of *Book 1: Church Handbook of Instructions*. What will you do with it and why?

I know the Brethren hope that the answers to these questions will be obvious, and we will soon receive some vital training to make it so.

I will give you a sneak preview: it is perfectly all right for you to read, study, understand, and apply what is written. For many months now, this new edition has been written, reviewed, rewritten, prayed over, and edited. It is not that the doctrine has changed, for it has not. It is that some conditions or concerns have arisen or changed with the growth and increased complexity of a worldwide Church, and instruction needs to be made more current and reflective of the additional or modified policies and procedures that have been adopted since the last edition was published.

In the administration of the Church, there is the need for order and exactness in some procedures, processes, and policies. There is also the need for freedom and flexibility for leaders to adapt certain circumstances to their local conditions and perhaps even the preferences of inspired stake presidencies and bishoprics. The major challenge is to be clear in our minds about what is prescribed and what is not.

One of the things that occupies much of the time and energy of the First Presidency is dealing with the letters from stake presidents and other leaders who are pleading for ratification of actions they have taken that were either incorrect or not their prerogative to make. I hope it is not news to this group that a man must be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood before being sent to the temple to be endowed or that in certain disciplinary cases the permission of the First Presidency is required before any change in status can occur.

I am not suggesting that we do not or cannot make mistakes or that we cannot repent. I am sure there are many of you, like I, who are grateful for forgiveness and the opportunity to repent and do better. Let me tell you of a personal experience that has left an indelible mark on me and for which I am very grateful.

When I was a very young stake president, a bishop and I worked with a fine young man who had made a terrible mistake that cost him his membership in the Church. While embarrassed and chastened, he was completely obedient and followed every suggestion and direction explicitly. His wife had forgiven him, and we felt the marriage was on solid ground. After a few months, his wife, who was expecting a baby, made a tearful plea that we do all that we could to hasten his readmission to the Church so that they might again have the priesthood in their home. I was touched by their sincerity and desire. Understanding less than I do now about the reasons we do and do not do some of the things outlined in our policies and procedures, I wrote a rather passionate, but I hope respectful, letter to the First Presidency in advocacy for the young man's position.

In two or three weeks, I received an unexpected phone call at my office. As I took the call, I almost fainted. I immediately recognized the soft, gravelly, and powerful voice of President Spencer W. Kimball, the prophet at that time. He greeted me kindly, said that he had received my letter, and then asked if I had my scriptures handy. I was then working in a public institution and was grateful that I could open my desk drawer and place the sacred volumes on the desk before me. He asked me to open the scriptures to Doctrine and Covenants section 58. When I got there, in his kindly way, he asked me to read verse 42: “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.”

He said, “Isn’t that a wonderful promise? I hope you are teaching that to your people.” He then asked me to read verse 43: “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.” President Kimball then said, “Isn’t it wonderful that your young man has confessed his sins? I wonder if you would feel all right if we give him a little more time to prove to himself that he has forsaken them?”

I, of course, immediately agreed that this was the approach to take. He then said, “That’s splendid. Thank you very much. Good-bye.” I learned a great deal that day, brethren, and continue to learn from it.

Unfortunately, in a way, the Church is much larger, more complex, and the pressures on the senior Brethren are much greater than ever before. They simply cannot pick up the phone and individually teach us what we need to know, although I am amazed at the level and intensity of their individual ministries. We owe it to them, the Church, and the people we serve to know and fully understand the policies and procedures of the kingdom so that our presiding leaders will not need to take the time and effort to teach us what we should have already known. A careful, regular, and thorough study of the handbooks that contain our policies and procedures will teach us clearly, in most cases, what it is we need to do and when it is we need to seek the direction and counsel of, or permission from, the First Presidency.

### **Watching Over the “Wanderers”**

Amidst the unsurpassed blessings of living in Utah are some challenges reasonably unique to us and other areas where there is a strong concentration of Church members. As we all know, many of our young people have multiple options as to where they can attend and affiliate with the Church. Some are authorized options such as the geographical home ward where they live, singles wards and branches sponsored by a

stake or group of stakes, or university and college stakes and wards.

In addition we have those I term “vagabond” Saints. These are those who consider themselves to be faithful Church members but attend wherever the fancy strikes them on a particular Sunday. Just as the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, so are the young women more beautiful and the young men more handsome in someone else’s ward. We have more than a few with their records in the lost and unknown files. We applaud you clerks for keeping the records clean and current, but we would remind all of you that we are in the people-saving business and must find a way to teach all of our people, including ourselves, the principles of accountability. When we cause the records to be removed from the stewardship of concerned and devoted priesthood leaders, the risk of not retaining these folks is very great. Please make every effort to stay in touch and follow up so that new priesthood leaders will know to look for these more casual members.

At least two of you in attendance have mentioned to me the frustration that occurs when you have felt it necessary to deny a temple recommend to one of these young people only to see them a few weeks later in the temple with a recommend issued from another unit. This ought not to be. We know that you who work with this highly mobile group of young people carry a tremendous load. We also know, and hope you know as well, that we have policies and procedures established for our use that would not make such an unfortunate occurrence possible. Please make the necessary calls and follow the essential procedures to see that we avoid these kinds of errors.

### **Retrenching against the Adversary**

We live in a time when the adversary is very active and is working very hard on our people in many ways previously not encountered. I do not believe there is a single stake in our midst where there are not those who are caught in the vicious jaws of pornography addiction. I hope none of you is in this situation, but if you are, I plead with you to work confidentially with your priesthood leader and get the help that can lead to repentance and healing. The Church has more resources than ever before to help in addressing this horrible epidemic, and this is also true in most of our communities.

Repentance and change, however, are still individual processes that must begin with an increased understanding of the Atonement and its power to save. We, like King Benjamin, “cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that [we] cannot number them” (Mosiah 4:29). We do plead

with you to stay close to your people and do all you can to help them with their struggles.

In addition to these many kinds of overt and serious sins creeping in among us, we also see some compelling evidence that casualness about some very important and sacred things is becoming more common as well. I'll mention just one example, but I am afraid there are many, and you will already be aware of them or can be if you watch carefully and prayerfully.

The proper wearing of the temple garment for those who have had the privilege of being endowed is very sacred and important for reasons that are clearly explained in the temple. It is very sad to see those who should know better dressing in clothing that requires the elimination or modification of the garment. Similarly, to see those in exercise apparel of various types doing their gardening, shopping, and other activities with apparent abandonment of the garment because they played tennis or jogged early in the morning is disappointing. We need to be sensitive to the feelings of the people, but we also need to be clear and courageous so as not to fail them because of our natural reticence to address these issues.

Let me share some scriptural insights that Jacob the brother of Nephi reported in dealing with some of the “wicked practices” he encountered in his ministry. I hope we can liken to ourselves what he says.

Wherefore I, Jacob, gave unto them these words as I taught them in the temple, having first obtained mine errand from the Lord.

For I, Jacob, and my brother Joseph had been consecrated priests and teachers of this people, by the hand of Nephi.

And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence; wherefore, by laboring with our might their blood might not come upon our garments; otherwise their blood would come upon our garments, and we would not be found spotless at the last day. (Jacob 1:17–19)

I do not know about you, but I am satisfied that I do not want to carry anyone else's sins or shortcomings. I have enough of my own and to spare!

### **Assisting Young People**

Lastly, brethren, I hope you will continue your very good work with our youth and our young single adults. Elder Bateman and your Area Seventies have been discussing and emphasizing the importance

of this with you. We are grateful for the progress that is being made, but we are reminded that we still have much more to do as the forces of evil attack our wonderful young people with a viciousness that seems to be unprecedented.

As you know we still have many challenges in the transition process for our young women from the Young Women program to Relief Society. The Relief Society general president and the Young Women general president, with their counselors, boards, and priesthood advisers continue to provide support for you and your ward and stake leaders. Please be knowledgeable about the guidelines and directions given on this vital transition, and then within these bounds do all you can to reach and retain the young women in your stewardships. The minions of the adversary know that if they can detract or capture the next generation of mothers, these angels of darkness will have made their own jobs so much easier. Our local sister leaders, called under the inspiration received by you, are generally wise, thoughtful, in tune with the spirit, and effective. Please listen to them, counsel with them, and support and assist them as they go about this essential work of building and retaining our special young women of the Church.

We thank you so much for all you do for our young men. If all of the Church were as effective as this group of stakes in preparing young men and women for missionary service, we would have a much larger and more effective force. Thank you for what you are doing, and please do all you can to help every able young man put his life in order to qualify and succeed. We ask that you also give particular attention to our newly returned missionaries. While the vast majority is doing very well, we are having too many get into needless difficulty during their first year home.

Many of those with special challenges now are those that had worthiness issues prior to their missions. Almost all were able to clean up their lives, enter the mission field worthily, and return home honorably. The disappointments tend to recur when they come home and return to some of the same friends, habits, and problems that created heartbreak for them initially. Please stay close to all of our young men and returned missionaries. Help them understand that the patterns of obedience, prayer, scripture study, Church attendance, and service will bring the same joy and protection at home as they experienced as missionaries.

We must remember that they, like us, vitally require the same three things President Hinckley identified as needs of new members: friends, responsibility, and nourishment by the good word of God. They



deserve all three in an appropriate and supportive environment.

Please encourage our young people to be involved in the institute of religion if they are not attending a Church university. Please teach them the importance of accountability to their bishops as well as the accountability the bishops have for them. Please give them a meaningful Church calling. It is curious to me that we send our young men and women out into the world to serve missions and let them make decisions as to who is qualified to be admitted into the Church, and then when they are honorably released, full of testimony and enthusiasm, we often do not trust them to teach in the deacons quorum. And bishops, if your returned missionaries are not attending your ward, please stay in contact with their priesthood leaders in the student or singles unit.

As I stated at the outset, so many of you are doing all of these things, and much more, so very well. I am sure that the Church has never been in better hands than yours. Your testimonies are strong, your leadership is effective, and countless lives are blessed daily because of your faith and inspired service to those in your charge. I pray heaven's blessings on you, your families, and those in your stewardship as you prepare their minds and hearts "to be faithful unto the Lord their God" (Alma 48:7).

I bear testimony of the reality of the Restoration, of your priesthood authority and callings, and of the inspired leadership of those presiding over us. **RE**