"Ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." 1 Thess. 5:15

Elder L. Tom Perry
"EVER FOLLOW THAT WHICH IS GOOD, BOTH AMONG YOURSELVES AND TO ALL MEN."

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Elder L. Tom Perry

of the Council of the Twelve

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I appreciate that type of introduction. I have to keep looking to see who they're introducing. We're just delighted to have this opportunity of being with you today. It's such a beautiful day to be with this group. Many of you have assisted me many times as we've had opportunities to travel throughout the Church. We respect you, and know of the great service you give in our Father in Heaven's Kingdom.

I'm fully aware today that this is probably an opportunity that I've seldom had -- to stand before a group that has such professional knowledge, skill, training, and experience. I'm sure that I should take advantage of that, and I intend to. You see, doctor, I have a problem. I realize we cannot have a normal counseling session today. I'm not in the privacy of your office. We can't sit one-to-one and talk things over. Of course I'm at an advantage because you can't charge me today either. I stand behind a pulpit and you sit as a congregation, so of course this is of necessity a one-way communication. However, the results of the time we spend here must determine a course of action, which will assist us in solving problems.

Before I get into my problem, I want to set the stage and give you a little of my background. I guess that's what you normally do. I've never had a session with any of you, but I imagine that's what occurs first. You see, I grew up in a Utah surrounding, born of goodly parents, as Nephi would say. My father was from a rural background, reared on a farm that he and his father had homesteaded in Idaho around Rexburg. My father was a fourth generation member of the Church. The first progenitor had moved to Utah in Box Elder County. When they decided to name the community, all the families put their names in a hat, and they drew out the name of "Perry" so they named it Perry, Utah. He was called to be the bishop of that ward, and he had a son who was called to be a bishop, and he had a son who was called to be a bishop. And my father was called to be a bishop.

My father's professions were first a farmer, then a teacher of history and English. He taught school until he entered university to write and to read and do simple arithmetic -- that is, except me. The concepts changed going on over here planning to settle in California. He ran out of money in Utah, and because he didn't know the language, a couple of those good Scandinavian people matched him up with a young lady and got him married before he really knew what was happening. So he settled down in Utah. He became a great leader, and was a farmer, a strong man, who was respected in his community.

Mother was also a teacher. She had my father as her first principal. He was just a young man, and when they married she became a homemaker. She was a good homemaker, and devoted her life to her family.

All my friends in the community I came from were about the same. In my high school class there was only one non-member of the Church. We converted her in the ninth grade, and that made it complete. Everyone was from similar circumstances.

In our home we were taught a most unique doctrine. We were taught about the worth of a soul. Scriptures were commonly brought to the breakfast, dinner, and supper table and discussed. We would hear our parents read, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." They were interested in imbuing in us the fact that our family was an eternal family. They used to tell us that the worth of a soul is great in the eyes of God, and that we had potential, and we should use that potential.

Mother, with her teaching ability, trained every child before they reached the age to go to school to write and to read. In fact, two members of our family walked into the first grade and the teacher had them for a half day, patted them on the head, and sent them on to the second grade. Every one of them was taught and trained before entering school to write and to read and do simple arithmetic -- that is, except me. The concepts changed when I came along, and they told my mother she shouldn't train the children before they started to school because the concepts were different. I was the only one who ever had a struggle in school. All the rest of them overcame the theme you have here today, "Ever follow that which is good, both for ourselves and for our
example. I remember so often the love my father had for Society. We learned how to serve people through their
sent them on to Church headquarters. He served in the
stake presidency. All the time my father served as bishop
after completing my mission papers as my bishop, he sat
lost his wife many years before and was not completely
those he served, and for those who served with him.

Then the Savior went on to say, “Ye call me Master
and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord
and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to
wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an
example, that ye should do as I have done unto you.
Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is no greater
than his lord; neither is he that is sent greater than he
that sent him.” Father taught us that lesson, and then by
example reinforced it.

I was six months old when my father was ordained a
bishop. He called me to go on my mission when I was
eighteen. Between the time that he called me and the
time I left, they changed his calling in the Church.
Attending stake conference one Sunday, without
talking to him, they put him in the stake presidency. So
after completing my mission papers as my bishop, he sat
down with me and signed them as my stake president and
sent them on to Church headquarters. He served in the
stake presidency for the next twenty years. So you see, I
never knew my father in any other role than bishop and
stake president. All the time my father served as bishop
my mother served as 1st counselor in the Ward Relief
Society. We learned how to serve people through their
example. I remember so often the love my father had for
those he served, and for those who served with him.

There was an old man who lived in our ward who had
lost his wife many years before and was not completely
mentally-balanced. Every time he’d get a little lonely,

he’d show up at our place. He’d ring the doorbell usually
about 4:00 o’clock in the morning. I remember how kind
my father was to him, never sending him away, but
usually inviting him to come in and rest until the family
was up and then have breakfast with us. Then Dad
would drive him over to his home as he would go to
work. Often I have gone with Mother as she has taken
supplies to nourish those in need. We grew up with the
spirit of service.

Now it was only natural as I started to establish my
own home, that I wanted to establish the same value
system that I had grown up with. I had learned the value
of a family. I knew that the family is an eternal unit. It is
important! It must be preserved! I’ve pondered many
times over the 2nd Section of the Doctrine & Covenants,
where it states, “Behold, I will reveal unto you the
Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the Prophet, before the
coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And
He shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises
made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall
turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth
would be utterly wasted as His coming.”

You see, without that family there would be no reason
for the Lord to return to rule and reign among His
people. For He will govern by family units--a family is
essential. So I desired to be a good husband and tried to
train myself that way. I desired to be a good father and be
close to my children, and grew to love and cherish each
one of them as they grew and matured. We tried to teach
them honesty in their lives. We found the same thing
happening in our generation that happened before. I
remember when I stole my first package of gum, and Dad
called me. Oh, how I had to work to pay back that
nickel for that package of gum. My son did the same
thing, and I followed that practice, and you know, it
worked! It imbued in him honesty.

We would have projects to teach them industry, to
work around home. The dating age was sixteen, and
they were taught chastity and morality in the home.
They grew up to appreciate and grow towards that. I had
a comfortable life. How I enjoyed it!

Then suddenly my life changed. I was a stake
president in Boston in October 1972 when we made
plans to come to general conference. My oldest daughter
had just been married, so we flew to Arizona
and visited her. Then we rented a car and drove to Salt
Lake for conference. It was a day like this, everything
was so beautiful. When I’d gone to rent the car, I’d asked
for a small Chevrolet which they didn’t have, so they’d
given me a Cadillac for the same price as a Chevrolet.
They argued a little, but they finally gave in. We took the
car, and on the way I got on the wrong road. When my
wife awakened she said, “Do you go through Delta when
you go to Salt Lake?” And I said, “Oh no, Delta’s clear
over on the west end of the state.” She said, “Well, the
sign back there said we’re on our way to Delta.” And I
said, “Oh, you can’t be right.”

Soon we arrived at Delta. We had to spend an extra
night. We got up the next morning and drove into Provo
where my son was going to school. And when I drove
onto the campus, a security guard pulled right behind
“Step in this door.” As I stepped in, the door closed right in front of me. You know what that does to you. I checked everything out and all seemed to be all right. I pulled over to the curb and looked in the rear view mirror. There sat my son next to the security officer. I thought, “My goodness, home from his mission a month and already in trouble with the law.” I got out a little disturbed. He got out of the security car and was just trembling. I said, “What’s the matter with you?” He said, “They’ve had me up all night looking for you. Where have you been?” So I told him what had happened, and he said, “You’re to call the office of the First Presidency. They’ve been looking for you since yesterday.” Suddenly I started to tremble.

We went into his room there at Deseret Towers, and called the office of the First Presidency. They said, “How fast can you come to Salt Lake?” I said, “Well, I can leave right now if that’s your wish.” He said, “Can you be here by 1:00 o’clock?” And I agreed to meet in the office of the First Presidency at 1:00 o’clock. We went out, got in the car, and started to drive to Salt Lake. A terrible feeling came over me on the way. I had a colored shirt on, and I was going to see the First Presidency! So I drove very rapidly and ran into Z.C.M.I. and bought a white shirt, then ran across the street to keep my appointment. They ushered me into Arthur Haycock’s office, and he said, “Step in this door.” As I stepped in, the door closed right behind me. There I was—alone in the office with President Lee. No one else there! I guess it’s a good thing they closed the door behind me, or I’d have fallen right back out. But President Lee was so kind and gentle. He got up and seated me at his side, and then started asking all sorts of questions. It was the most thorough interview I’ve ever had in my life. After about half an hour he leaned back in his chair and said, “Would it be very difficult for you to leave Boston and move to Salt Lake City?” I was a little thunderstruck at that—I was in business back there. But I said, “Well, if that’s what you want me to do, President, I’d be happy to do it.” Then we talked about a time interval. And then he called me to be a General Authority. The shock was overwhelming! I don’t remember what happened after that. I know that I found my family and explained it to them, and we finally made it to conference the next day. A General Authority! What a shock!

Now I’ve had nine years of that calling, and I feel the burden of the responsibility. We belong to an ever-growing, rapidly-expanding Church. At my birth the Church had only 560,000 members. At the time of my call, 3,200,000. During the nine years I’ve been a General Authority, it’s increased 40% to 4,900,000. It is now worldwide, and most of the growth is coming from outside the comfortable environment I knew all of my life. As I travel around the Church, I see a struggle occurring with a new type of people joining the Church. I’ve thought about them, and studied them, and been with them, I can see they are very different. And this is what my problem is about.

I asked Val MacMurray to send me over a few statistics, and as I look these over, I can see a major change occurring in the population of the Church. It’s very different from what I knew -- very different from this comfortable environment of growing up in Utah where your friends, your family, your associates all have common backgrounds, common purposes, and are very similar in their desires and ambitions. These statistics concern me because in this body that is coming into the Church is a different mix than we’ve ever known before.

Current statistics suggest that the traditional family we’ve known in the past is continuing to change. Greater stress is being placed on both the parent and the child. These statistics are alarming. The marriage rate is decreasing with more and more couples delaying marriage. Between 1970 and 1980 the marriage rate dropped 17%. In 1980 over 50% of all U.S. women between 20 and 24 years of age remained single, compared with 36% in 1970. Among women 25 to 29 years of age, the percent of unmarried women doubled from 10 to 21% in the decade of the 70’s. Divorce continues to increase. Divorce in the last ten years has increased 65% to a record high of 1,200,000 in 1980. Divorce is now so rampant that one marriage in every two terminations. That’s making a dramatic change in the family composition. More children are being reared in single parent families. They state now that 18,000,000 live in what I knew to be “broken homes.” We’d never use that term today. It’s a “single parent family.” There’s been a 40% increase in the number of children living with one parent between 1970 and 1980.

The number of couples who live together without being married has dramatically increased. Two million, seven hundred thousand are living together unmarried, which is 154% increase during the 70’s.

The traditional family consisting of a working father, stay-at-home mother, and one or more children is now in the minority, only representing 13% of all the U.S. families. More and more women are working, and I think being forced to it. It’s just a way of life now. Thirty million American children now have homes that are different than the one I knew. Forty-three percent of the women who are working have children under six. Sixty-four percent of all children between the ages of three and five spend part of their day in a day-care facility.

As I stated, this is different from what I knew, and we’re starting to see some trends occur because these traditional values have been changed. Marriage as an institution is breaking down. The importance of religion is becoming less dominant in people’s lives. Thrift and savings seem not to be a part of the American family. Patriotism and hard work for its own sake are losing their appeal. We find parents who are not willing to sacrifice for their children, unwilling to push their children, believing that children should be free to make their own decisions. These parents are permissive. They question authority. They believe that children have no future obligations to parents. They believe that having children is an option, not a social responsibility. An outgrowth of this is starting to occur in the number of battered wives, physically and sexually-abused children, vandalism in our schools, the soaring number of pregnancies among unmarried teenagers, elderly people living alone without the solace of an extended family.

Do you see what is developing? The composition of
those who are coming into the Church today is very different. Of the 251,000 converts we're bringing into the Church, if these statistics are a sample of those coming in, only 2,800 of them will be from the traditional home—only 2,800. One hundred thousand of them will be from homes that have had divorces. One hundred and forty thousand of them will have spent most of their pre-school time in day care centers.

I think that poses all sorts of challenges to us. Certainly the Church can be a great source of inspiration and comfort to these people who need it. But think of the burden that will fall on Priesthood leaders. Most of them, like myself I guess, have grown up in the traditional-type home and are completely unfamiliar or unaccustomed to the challenges they will be facing and the types of problems that will be coming before them. And these problems will come in greater numbers.

We'll find that preparing young people for marriage will be a great problem, because they haven't known what a traditional home is, or what it means to live in the type of surroundings we were accustomed to. Yes, there is a great change occurring. I think your profession is very secure. I can't believe you're going to run out of clientele in the future. If anything, it is going to increase.

There is professional help available. Some of it is not the caliber we think people should be using. Some of this so-called “help” believes we should cast aside time-honored, proven institutions, that the people who come to them should not be inhibited at all. They prescribe tranquilizers and other drugs in abundance to keep them under control. They have the people create their own value system, not something that has existed for generations. They try to get them to think only of themselves, to shed responsibility. Then, unfortunately, many professionals get so caught up in what they're doing in dealing with problems continually that they can't leave it alone. Soon they find themselves becoming part of the problem.

Then, on the other side, there are many, many humble and dedicated men and women who believe in the worth of a soul, who have their roots firmly established in Gospel principles, who have faith in the Lord and His system that has brought great joy and happiness for over 6,000 years to His children. They're receptive to counsel of Priesthood leaders. And most important of all, they live what they teach.

Now doctor counselor, you see we do have a problem. Can you help? I think there are many things you can do. With these problems descending on Priesthood leaders, I think you'd be a tremendous resource to them—not to sit and counsel in the place of a bishop. His role is defined and established. But I think you can do a great service in helping bishops understand how to deal with some of these great problems that will be coming to them in numbers we've never known before because of the lack of stability of some of our converts—not because of their problems, but because of generation after generation not being taught the right way, and not being in a position to understand.

Then, of course, you can accept positions of service and responsibility on a stake level, ward level, or quorum level as home teachers, and as exemplary fathers and mothers, an exemplar in your own profession. Yes, I think the complexion of the Church is changing dramatically. We see it as we travel to the stakes and wards. We feel it in the distress of Priesthood leaders pleading for help to have better understanding in a field that is unfamiliar to them and different than the environment they've grown up in. I think you, as a body, can offer great service and help in assisting those Priesthood leaders understand some of the complexities that they'll be facing.

We challenge you to be the type of counselor who can be trusted completely in your dealings with those that need your help and counseling. Oh, how the Gospel of Jesus Christ will lift a soul! We see it so often. For you to help them on that road will be of great benefit. Be careful, so that the problems will not weigh you down and you can be fresh every time in your approach to helping others. Be careful that you do not carry the burdens with you always, that you learn how to shed them and free yourself and live a balanced life, and not let the problems of the world that you deal with so often weigh you down to the point where you become discouraged. Have that vitality, that enthusiasm for life that you should have. Radiate a goodness as your profession touches lives, and I think you will make a major, major contribution to the world we live in today.

Now may God bless you that you will remain close to Him, that you will seek His guidance, that you will plead for His spirit to guide you as you do your part in helping to deter the terrible decay that is occurring in the lives of so many families. The next generation will have hope, because we are there with a helping hand, with a willing heart, with a firm faith to lift and to reach out, and to help them build the bridge that will lead to their eternal life.

I give you my witness that Jesus Christ is the Christ, that His Gospel is on the earth to bless our lives, and that a Prophet of the Lord is very close to the Savior, and his word can be trusted completely as a foundation on which to build our lives.

Again, may God bless you in all that you have to do. We rely on you, trust you, and have confidence in you. I leave my blessings with you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.