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Transgression

Bishop Vaughn J. Featherstone
Of the Seventy
1975

Today I have been asked to talk to you about transgression. One of the good brothers asked me if they could ask questions and that reminded me of the fellow up in Idaho who had a wooden leg and he moved into a new ward. He had only been there a short time and two or three ladies wanted to know what happened; you know, how did he lose his leg and they talked among themselves until finally one of them said, "Well, I'm going over and ask him." So she went over to him and said, "Do you mind if I ask you a question?" And he said, "That's all right, if you promise to ask only one." And she said, "Very well then, how did you lose your leg?" And he said, "It was chewed off." So, what I'll do is, I'll let you ask questions at the end if you promise to ask only one.

How many members of stake presidencies and bishops do we have here? I see we have a great many of them. I won't be teaching you anything new, but I might for those who aren't aware of the probing which we do as priesthood leaders. Let me tell you some of the reasons for this. We had an Aaronic Priesthood worker, a man who was also a stake mission president, in one of our areas and he got involved in a homosexual experience and very soon he was the carrier. (I don't know what the right term is, but I've used carrier.) Anyway, by the time they finally took action on

him, he had had homosexual relations with many, many Aaronic Priesthood boys in that stake. And it absolutely made me sick inside to suppose that priesthood leaders would go that long without handling the transgressor appropriately. Now, your stewardship is different in that you do work with them and labor diligently and use your professional expertise in solving the problem. Ecclesiastically, we approach it from a little different standpoint. Hopefully, most of our bishops are good counselors; they know how to counsel; they have had experience; and more important, they are living a pure life so that they may counsel in the way the Lord would have them counsel: I mean by direct revelation and inspiration.

A young man came to me at one time and we discussed many things. He broke down emotionally, and told me of serious problems he had encountered. Simply stated: He and his wife had met. She had come from Michigan and had wanted to marry a fine LDS returned missionary. She met him and they were married in the temple. They were active in their ward, and then moved to another ward and decided that, "We've been too active in the Church. We don't need to be that active anymore." They had decided not to get involved in church work. By the time the membership records did come and were read in the new ward and contact was made, they had fairly well determined that this inactivity in the Church was the kind of life they wanted. He said, "I have started to smoke, and I drink coffee, and I have an occasional alcoholic beverage. We don't go to church. My wife doesn't live the commandments either, and she has fallen in love with a particular man (and he named the name). I know that it bothers her because she has driven up the canyon two or three times with the idea of driving off a cliff somewhere and ending it all. She doesn't know how to get out of it." With as strong as any impression I have ever had I said to him, "Well, really there is no reason she ought to stay with you. You know, you are really not much of a man. She came out to Salt Lake and married a returned missionary with all the fine qualities one would expect. All that's left of the fine specimen she married is the hollow shell of a man. All those fine qualities you had have been cast aside. Why should

she stay with someone like you?" Well, that shocked him a little bit and I got his attention, and then I said—I am cutting an hour interview down to five minutes for you—"I'll tell you what you do. You decide right now that you'll never smoke again, and you give me the cigarettes, and then you promise me you'll never drink a cup of coffee, that you will never drink another alcoholic beverage. You pay your tithing this Sunday at church and I'll give you a special blessing to help you with all these problems. The Lord will bless you, if you will make a commitment." And then I said, "You go home and tell your wife this, and I would tell you the same thing if you were on the other end fooling around with some other woman." I said, "You tell your wife this, to put on her temple garments, and that if I were the bishop, and she saw this man again, I would hold a church court on her for conduct unbecoming a Latter-day Saint and possible eventual family abandonment. This is simply what she is doing." Well, it was like taking a two-by-four and hitting him. He listened, committed, stopped smoking that instant and went home. He and his wife stayed up late through the night and I guess they had quite a talk deciding that though they were not in love, they would make some real adjustments. The next night about 6:00 the boyfriend called, and she was already to go. In fact, she went upstairs and took a shower and decided, I've just got to go. Although she had not committed adultery, there had been some necking going on and indiscretions that a married woman never should have with anyone other than her husband, and they had fallen in love with each other. In spite of what they had talked about the night before, her commitment ebbed away, and she took a shower to get ready to go. After she climbed out of the shower and dried off, she put her garments on, and when she put her garments on she said, "Then I knew that I could not go." I think that is significant.

A couple of months ago, I attended a party on Labor Day. The wife of this man slipped up beside me, took hold of my hand and said, "I really do love my husband now, and he is worth loving. I want to tell you what you have done as far as our marriage is concerned." She told me, "I really had considered suicide, and now to be able to go back to church again and have family prayer, and

family home evening, well. . .” What I am saying then is that we must be guided by the Spirit in our interviews. If I were that bold and came on that strong with someone else, I would probably drive him right out of the church, or maybe even further into the problem. That’s why I say an ecclesiastical leader must be pure in heart and must be guided by inspiration and revelation.

Another thing, as you know, you can never discuss certain things with individuals without them thinking, “I wonder if he has a hang-up, too.” If you start going beyond the laws of propriety in your discussion, for example, if you would say something like, “Have you had sexual relations?” “Yes.” “How many times?” “40.” “What was it like? Give me an idea.” You really don’t need to know that. You don’t need to go beyond the laws of propriety. If you find out in homosexual relations what they have done basically, you don’t need to ask about the experience itself, because they will think, “Maybe he has his hang-up.” Maybe you do, if you have to ask those kind of questions. I think there is a very delicate balance in probing wisely and deep enough to get the facts but not to the point where you may be accused of fantasizing.

Let me discuss a couple of other things with you. First, what do you do when someone reports to your boss that you have mishandled a problem, say in counseling or in an adoption. We had a case like this. I’ll try to change it enough so no one will recognize it. A lady went to a General Authority and said, “We’ve had our name on the baby list to receive a baby-adoptive parent list for possibly three or four years, but we haven’t been able to get a baby. We understand that the waiting period is 24 to 26 months. Is there something wrong? Why can’t we get a baby?” And the counselor said, “Well, in the first place, these babies are given by inspiration, and I’ll tell you something, you’ll never get a baby.” The wife was shocked, and, of course, as she told her husband later, he was shocked. “Why, why wouldn’t we get a baby?” “Well, you are over age, and you’ll never get a baby.”

Well, she went to a General Authority and said, “Is that possibly true? Will we not ever had a baby?” The General Authority checked with us and we found out who the social worker was, so they counseled that social worker. The social worker went

right back and just raked this couple over the coals for going to a General Authority. Well, whose hang-up is it? Certainly, the adopting parents might have had a hang-up, and now it becomes the social worker who has to save his or her ego for some reason I don't understand. The social worker should be mature and stable, and secure. I wouldn't think that he or she would need to defend himself/herself to someone who was having problems. I am not just talking about adopting parents. It happens in many areas, where you counsel and word gets back to your boss that you said such and such. I would tell you here that I really believe that your employers will not misjudge you. If you have had a traditional history of being competent, I don't believe they will misjudge you in any way. I think they will simply call you in and question it, and they will stand by you.

Another thing about which I feel very keenly in your work, and in anyone's work who does the type of thing you do, is please don't take everyone's problems home with you. I have a personal conviction that you can interview people with problems most of the day. You take it off of their heart, and I believe you can also lift it off of your heart. I can interview a person with a problem and they will leave, then someone else will come in with a problem—a different problem—and I can listen, and cry with them if the Spirit moves that way and I am deeply moved. When they leave, then someone else can come in, and when I leave to go home from work, I can actually leave my briefcase there, cast everything behind, and go home and just lead a normal life. I think we must do that. I don't think we can carry on our hearts all of these problems.

Occasionally, as we interview homosexuals, adulterers, fornicators, and others, we need to be very careful to remember that homosexuality, fornication and adultery are equal in seriousness: I have heard from two of the prophets of the Church that they are. If that is true, then how can we say that we handle the homosexual differently because it is not so serious, because he is not tampering with life's process. He is tampering with life's process, and in fact, he is involved in a perverted love experience, if you can use the word "love" in that context. He or she has problems. We listen to

their rationalization and very soon we start thinking, “Well you know, he is right, it isn’t as serious,” and so we start teaching it. I have heard several of our social workers really start to compromise the standards of the Church because they had interviewed enough people who had rationalized and justified, that they, our workers, started sliding over into a position of compromise. When this happens you have just lost your effectiveness.

Let me suggest the way that I think we ought to interview as ecclesiastical leaders. You, as counselors and psychotherapists, would interview much differently. We have a right to interview this way and everyone has a right to be interviewed in depth to find out what kind of life they are living. We had 1384 temple recommend holders in the stake in which I served as stake president and I interviewed 500 people personally. I would meet them at the door and say, “How are you?” “Fine.” “Your family’s fine?” “Yes.” “Your children are well?” “Yes.” “Even your boy on his mission is doing well?” “Yes.” Anyway, I would come across the floor and be very warm to them and then sit, not behind the desk but across the corner of the desk or out in front. Then I would say something like this, “Now, before this interview begins, if there has been a major transgression in your life, that has not been confessed and adjusted—and President Kimball said that it is critical to say ‘and adjusted’—then I’d like to know about it before this interview ends—not that I need to know but that I want to take it off of your heart. If I can close it, I will close it, and you need not open it again and if not, we can take the appropriate action and help you to repent.” Now, with that introduction almost immediately I could tell whether the person I was interviewing had a problem. It comes back to their mind and they think, “Finally now, am I going to be able to tell? Does he really want to know? Will I have enough courage? Is he going to ask the questions so that it will come out?” So I ask the next question, “Is there any problem with the Word of Wisdom? tea? coffee? liquor? tobacco? and so forth,” and I am not going to attend to those particular questions, but we need to go slow enough to get a response to each one. If they have been to the temple, I talk about wearing their temple garments properly, and keeping the Sabbath day holy. I talk about whether

they are affiliated with an apostate church, or whether they are full tithe payers, and sustaining the bishop and so forth. Now, I hurry so that I can get to this part and say, "Are you morally clean?" You know in all the interviews I have ever conducted, I have never had anyone say no. I can ask everyone in this room and I know what you would say. Every single person in this room would say, "Yes, I am morally clean." Why do we say yes to that question? Because most people justify and rationalize their conduct. Elder Stapley, when I traveled with him once, said, "When you ask about masturbation, don't ask 'do you?,' but ask 'how long has it been?'" Do you see the difference? If a fellow did it a week ago, or had a problem or a young lady did, they say, "Heavenly Father, I'm going to promise that I'll never do that again." A week later you see them in the interview, you ask "Do you have a masturbation problem" and they answer no. In their minds they think, "Well, I've prayed about it and I won't do it anymore." They are answering honestly, but the next night after the interview is over, they know they will not be interviewed for another year. Satan will come tempting and there is a tendency to slip. If we ask them how long has it been, then you find out, and you can find out if it has been a week, or two weeks, or six years. If it has been six years, go on to the next question. If it has been two weeks, then let me suggest how you can help them overcome the problem. Give them a special blessing. I think ecclesiastical leaders who do not take the opportunity to give special blessings really miss a sweet experience and miss the opportunity to bless the lives of the persons they are interviewing. Also, always promise them by the power of the priesthood that they will have the power to overcome the temptations.

Then the next question is, "Have you ever had sexual relations outside of your marriage that have not been confessed and adjusted?" Anyone who has confessed can say, "No, I have not," even if they have had the problem 100 times, if they have confessed and adjusted it, they can say, "No, I have not," and that's the way to do it. A stake president or bishop who would say, "Have you ever had sexual intercourse outside of your marriage?" really is unfair. The person who has confessed thinks, "Do I have to open

it again? I've told the president about it and my bishop. Do I have to start all over again, and get somebody else's approval to be forgiven?" Sometimes people don't understand doctrine and church government like they should. So out of the honesty of their heart they will say, "Yes, I did have, but I have confessed it to the bishop or stake president." Well, that isn't fair for us to even know that much. If they have closed it, it ought to be closed. A priesthood leader exercises unrighteous dominion if he opens it again. In fact, he is teaching by example that previous priesthood leaders did not have the exceptional qualities to judge which he possesses. If a transgression has been confessed and adjusted, we ought to let it rest. There may be circumstances related to callings in the Church which will require a reopening.

That brings me to another point: we need to be very careful in our relationships with the sisters, that we don't flirt—that we mentally don't flirt. Someone has said there are 600,000 ways of communicating, and if you just think or flirt in your heart, communication is going to take place that your standard is subject to compromise. You need to be very, very careful and hold your own marriage together. I believe you can do it. Great priesthood leaders, including the Brethren, can listen to the story, make an accurate judgment—a determination, and exercise whatever decision they would, and then move on to the next one, but they are not affected by the transgression. In other words, do not suppose that listening to the transgression will pollute your mind. In the 20th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the 22nd verse, the Savior gives us the solution. He said, "Though he (the Savior) suffered temptation, he gave them no heed." I believe the Twelve Apostles probably face the same kinds temptations each of you have faced, but have given them "no heed." One of the Brethren, as a young man, came back from his mission, walked down the main street of Salt Lake City and he lusted after several women that he saw on the street. So, he said he went back to his office, as a young man, and knelt down and said, "Heavenly Father, I don't want to lust anymore." He finished the fervent prayer and went out and walked down the street and he lusted a second time. So he went back to his office, knelt down again and said, "Heavenly Father, please, I

need some strength.” A third time he went out and still he said he lusted. Finally after the fourth time, he went out and he said he overcame the problem. Sometimes it takes fasting, prayer and determination. He gave temptation no heed, and since that time, he said, “I have never had a problem in my life.” Well, I believe that is the solution to part of it.

I visited a stake about a year ago. A couple came to my office within the past week who said, “You were in our stake and we heard what you said, and we want to repent. We went to our stake president and we told him part of the problem. We were just fishing to see how he would react, and he just brushed it off. So we thought that, ‘Well, we can’t go to this stake president, he’ll just brush it off.’ We went to our bishop and he really wasn’t interested in listening.” Members have the right in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints of having a transgression taken off of their heart, and they must confess a major transgression and submit to priesthood leaders for appropriate action before the transgression can be lifted from their hearts. So ask the question, watch carefully and be guided by the Spirit. I believe, as priesthood leaders again, you really have the right, whether you call it inspiration or intuition, until you feel a peace in your heart, don’t move. It may be well to say something like, “There’s something wrong in this interview, I can’t tell you what, it is, I just know that I do not feel at peace with the Spirit. Would you mind going home and fasting for twenty-four hours and then coming back and telling me why I cannot feel at peace.” Twenty-four hours is a long time for them, if there has been something wrong. But I don’t think I ever remember saying this to someone and they didn’t come back and say, “I know what it is. This is what the problem is.” Then you can help them solve it.

The next question is, “Has there ever been a major transgression in your life that has not been confessed and adjusted?” Now, there is no room to hide. I interviewed one man, who was in a fairly high place in his stake and he said, “I really believe that you can sleep with a woman overnight, but actually not commit adultery. In fact, I have done it.” He said, “I have slept with my secretary three different times, five and six hours. We’ve done every other

thing, but we have not actually committed adultery. We have not had sexual relations.” Who is he fooling? He may not have had sexual relations, but he committed adultery just as surely as anything in this life. And yet, there is something in the minds of members in the Church that says if we go to this point and we don’t go beyond that point we will always be able to answer the questions just right, so we are safe. Members who come like that have deceived themselves and they are able to get by, but they have a withdrawing of the Spirit. If we can bring the problem to the surface then I believe we are on the road to resolution. We have a right to be directed by the Spirit and have the powers of our calling in the Church.

There was a man up in our area that when I asked, “Has there ever been a major transgression in your life that has not been confessed and adjusted?” He said, “Would you call premeditated murder a major transgression?” I was shocked and said, “Of course, it is,” and tears came to his eyes. I said, “Who was it?” And he said, “It was my brother-in-law. He is the meanest, dirtiest, orneriest human being that ever walked the face of the earth. I planned to shoot him and take his body up to Dry Creek and bury it by a big rock, and no one would ever find him, and no one would ever miss him.” And he said, with tears streaming down his cheeks, “Can I ever be forgiven?” Trying to get a handle on it, I said, “Did you kill the man?” He said, “No, but I planned to.” I said, “Why didn’t you do it?” And he said, “Well, I thought about my sister and decided she deserved him.” Well, I told him the issue was closed and need not be opened again. The very same man was in his fifties and he had a personal abuse problem. When we take a burden off of a man’s heart and he walks out of the office, my heart is lighter and I know he feels better. Whether the priesthood leaders know about it or not, an unconfessed transgression is there, the burden is there. As the sinner or transgressor repents and takes it off of his heart, it is lifted off the heart of the priesthood leader also. I really believe that principle, and it is just one of Vaughn Featherstone’s opinions. In fact, this whole talk is Vaughn Featherstone’s opinion. It is not doctrine. I’m just giving you some thoughts that I felt were very effective as we use them in our stake

in interviewing. I think they comply with everything I've read in *The Miracle of Forgiveness* and everything I've heard in our meetings with the First Presidency.

A critical time is after the confession and adjustment comes. For example, we need to teach across the Church, and as counselors you need to know, that the presiding authority, the ecclesiastical leader, the bishop or stake president, has the right to close that particular case forever on behalf of the Church and it need not be opened again during a normal worthiness interview. There are a few exceptions as previously mentioned. Many priesthood leaders do not say that, and then the member doesn't really know that the incident is closed. We need to teach our members that if they transgress again, then all of the former sins return, and then they would need to be confessed also (Doctrine and Covenants 82:7). There are four courses of action open to a priesthood leader to take. The first course of action—that it may be closed forever and need never be opened again under normal circumstances.

Second, put them on probation between the priesthood leader (bishop or stake president) and the individual. And I think that's a very critical action. We oftentimes don't use this enough. We should use it more with our youth. Fornication, adultery, and homosexuality are equal in seriousness. Handling the transgressor is different. With fornication, they are young, unmarried, and usually they have had very little experience. Their testimonies aren't solid and so a priesthood leader may choose to handle it a little differently, with more lenience. Bend over backward to convert and teach our youth in the repentance process. Now, the adulterer, the man who has been through the temple is different. He knows far too much and should be handled with much greater firmness and Church discipline. The 42nd section of the Doctrine and Covenants says, "But he that has committed adultery and repents with all his heart, and forsaketh it, and doeth it no more, thou shalt forgive." (D&C 42:25) President McKay said, "No act is ever committed without having first been justified in the mind." If a person transgresses, he has justified it in his mind first. These are the consequences for sin and the sinner must be willing to

accept the punishment. I think the idea of probation is for those who are inexperienced in the Church.

We had a letter just this past week from a stake president who sent in two court cases. One was a bishop and one was a high councilor. One was three months ago and one was just recently. The bishop who had committed adultery more than once was disfellowshipped. The high councilor had an extramarital affair over a period of years. He also was disfellowshipped. I'm convinced that the priesthood leader will have to take further action later. One of the cruelest things he could do is not to take appropriate action, to be too soft, and I think that was too soft. I think the bishop in his high position knew far too much to simply have his hands slapped gently. It was not suffering or punishment equal to the serious nature of the transgression. I wonder if a person can really repent unless he or she has suffered enough, hurt enough and desires to repent enough. President Kimball said it isn't how much time passes bringing about repentance, but how much actual repenting. Some people can repent more in twenty-four hours than others may do in twenty-four months. I am convinced that is true. I have seen it and you have seen it.

The third course of action that we may take as a priesthood leader is disfellowshipment. Disfellowshipment is, of course, a temporary state and it is just pending further court action. Either you refellowship them if they repent, or if they haven't, you reconvene a court and take further action. When the shock hasn't been severe enough, and a change hasn't taken place in their lives, then a further court to excommunicate them is held. The fourth action we may take is excommunication.

As President Lee came into the First Presidency, you recall that there was quite a weeding-out process take place. The questioning and personal worthiness interviews took on a great dimension. This policy has not changed with President Kimball. I believe, as I mentioned in my priesthood talk last time, there is a purging. Many people who have been involved in Church court action will tell you that one of the great blessings of their lives was excommunication, which enabled them to make a change and adjustment in

their lives. However, others it may have destroyed. We need to develop that sensitivity to the Spirit. Don't suppose that the priesthood leader doesn't receive revelation and inspiration. I have seen farmers who had very little or no experience in counseling who, with the Lord's help, have been exceptional counselors. I have seen bishops who were truck drivers to earn a livelihood, and had hardly any human relations training and little or no college experience. And yet they interview members and change their lives.

There is yet another case of a homosexual in a distant city who came down with his wife to see President Kimball. President Kimball interviewed them and outlined a program for this man to overcome his problem. When they finished the interview, the homosexual said President Kimball did not understand. He felt the Brethren were old-fashioned about their counsel to the "homosexual." So the man and his wife went to a psychiatrist here in Salt Lake, and as they visited with him, he also made the same statement, that the Brethren aren't up-to-date on this particular problem. He suggested how to work with it, and outlined a different course of action. The man followed the psychiatrist, the professional. The homosexual went back home, lost his wife and the four daughters, was excommunicated from the Church, and lives now with his homosexual friend. I really believe and will bear my witness that if he had done what President Kimball told him to do, he would still be a high priest in the Church. I believe he would still have his wife, and children and the homosexual problem would be behind him. I am convinced that when a Prophet speaks—and let me include our stake presidents and bishops also—with very, very few exceptions, they always speak for the Lord.

I don't know how I am going to relate this, but I want to tell you because it is significant to you who work so hard. It hardly relates to the subject. It is this: when you go home, you need to really be home—you need to really be a father. I knew a mission president who told a group of bishops the following story:

When I was called to be the mission president, I went out and just put my heart and soul into the work. For about the first three months that we were out there, I really bent my back and the work started

moving up. I set up a mission tour and my wife came to me and said, "You set up the zone conference the same time we have back-to-school night. Can't you cancel your zone conference?" He said, "I had a real process trying to determine whether I'd cancel the meeting or not." I finally decided I'd cancel my zone conference and go to "back-to-school" the next night. I went, and as I went to the first class everything was all right. I went to the second class and everything was all right. I went to the third class and as I was looking at some of the paintings and sketches the children had done on the wall, I looked over at my wife who was standing by the desk of our little boy, crying. I walked over and stood by her and asked what the problem was. She couldn't even speak, she just pointed down at the paper on the desk. I looked down and read these words in an essay. "I am a dumb boy. I live in a dumb home. This is a dumb town. I have a dumb family, and I belong to a dumb church."

Sometimes we as social workers, bishops, stake presidents, and General Authorities are so involved with others, that we can't see a little boy whose soul is crying out for some attention. This great mission president said, "I spent many years since my mission trying to remove the word 'dumb' from the boy's vocabulary. And now he is a fine young man." What a heartrending story. Now, that really doesn't tie in to all the rest of this except with one principle. Please make certain when you are home, you really have the same empathy, understanding, kindness, consideration, tolerance, and sensitivity that you have when you are interviewing someone professionally.

I'd like to share one more short example. I had a woman come into the office at work and she said, as she leaned across the desk, "Bishop Featherstone, I have a burden on my heart that I can't carry one more step in this life. I know how tender you are and I wouldn't add one featherweight of burden to your heart, but I just cannot live one more day." I said, "You misunderstand. When you take it off of your heart, you take it off of my heart also. So you tell me the problem." She said, "Thirty-four years ago I had an abortion before my husband and I got married. Can I ever in this life or in eternity be forgiven? Must I be cast out forever? Is there any hope?" Then she said, "I am remarried to another man. He was a Catholic and now he has joined the Church and is presently the Elders Quorum president. Can we ever go to the temple where

I can be sealed to him?” This soul, for thirty-four years, every waking minute of her life, kept thinking of this dreadful transgression. I said, “I really don’t know. Let me check with President Kimball (who at that time was the president of the Quorum of the Twelve).” So I wrote the letter, got a response back about two weeks later. I called her, and I said, “Can you meet me after work? I’d like to talk to you about this.” So I met her after work at the stake office and when she came, she was pale and her eyes were bloodshot. She must have been down on her knees a dozen times during the day, saying, “Heavenly Father, whatever it is, I’ll accept it, but please be merciful.” I said, “Let me not keep this from you one second longer than I have to.” And I picked up the letter and read, “Dear President Featherstone: You inquired about a woman who had committed an abortion 34 years ago. From the way you describe her—and I had told him about her, the kind of woman she was; there wasn’t a more Christ-like woman in our stake: she baked bread and cookies for neighbors, and I never heard her gossip; she was the one that would get down on her hands and knees and scrub the Relief Society floors: I guess supposing she wasn’t even worthy to do the dishes—it sounds like she has long since repented. You may tell her on behalf of the Church, she is forgiven.” Well, when I said these words, it was like I had taken a 1000-pound burden off her shoulders. She just burst into tears and sobbed. And I said, “Let me read you the second paragraph. ‘After a thorough and searching interview, you may issue this sweet sister a temple recommend.’” If I had been in the presence of the Savior that day, I wouldn’t have felt any closer to Him than I did after I had that experience, because I believe that’s what Jesus would have done had He been there.

In the 32nd chapter of Exodus, verse 32, is a verse that I think expresses what our attitude should be as we serve in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Moses comes down out of the mountain to find the children of Israel along with Aaron, worshipping the golden calf. You recall the terrible destruction that took place. Many of the wicked children of Israel were slain as the earth opened and swallowed them. Finally, those who had been spared were called to repentance by Moses, and in this verse Moses goes back before

the Lord and says, "Yet now, If thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee out of thy book which thou hast written." As I tell the brethren each Sunday morning, that is the way I pray. As I have interviewed hosts of members who have repented, when the interview ends, I sit down behind my desk and say, "Heavenly Father, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee out of thy book which thou hast written. I don't want to be where they aren't." These are some of the most Christ-like people I know. Many of us have walked that hairline. Fortunately, we have been able to somehow, miraculously, to escape a major transgression. Others haven't gotten so close, but those who do slip, maybe just one step makes the difference, or one circumstance against which they did not have the integrity to stand, must experience repentance. I believe in "the miracle of forgiveness" with all my heart and soul. I don't think we need to have what some call a "hanging bishop." I believe that when the right thing to do is to excommunicate to save the soul, we do it. When the right thing is to disfellowship, we do it. When the right thing to do is to close it so it need not be opened, we do it. In many, many cases, that is the course of action we ought to take, we do it.

Well, God bless you. I am grateful to be here with you. I have been very frank, maybe more so than I should have been. I hope that you just sift these thoughts through your mental processes. They invited me to express my opinion and so I have given it on these things, but I want you to think very carefully about them. Now again, the Lord bless you in your assignments. You have an awesome responsibility. I believe He will hover as close to you as any workers in any profession on the face of the earth, because you are doing probably what the Savior spent his whole life doing, in just a little different way. You are healing souls. God bless you. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.