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

Elder L. Tom Perry

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp

Recommended Citation

Perry, Elder L. Tom (1981) "'Ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.' 1 Thess. 5:15," Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy: Vol. 7 : No. 4 , Article 2.
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol7/iss4/2

This Article or Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
"EVER FOLLOW THAT WHICH IS GOOD, BOTH AMONG YOURSELVES AND TO ALL MEN."
I THESS. 5:15
Elder L. Tom Perry
of the Council of the Twelve
Presented at the AMCAP Convention
October 1, 1981

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 was from similar circumstances. 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 who ever had a struggle in school. All the rest of them brought home straight 'A' report cards all of the time. At the end of every semester I'd sneak into the barn after school was over. Dad would have to come out and review my report card with me in the barn. He had a way of doing that very effectively when we were alone, too. But our parents taught us to try to achieve. "Don't be afraid to try" is the doctrine we were taught. My parents followed the theme you have here today, "Ever follow that which is good, both for ourselves and for our

AMCAP JOURNAL/OCTOBER 1981
fellowmen." That was basic.

And, of course, fundamental in this home was the teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was paramount. We spent many hours in scriptural study. We were just like Lehi's family where the scriptures delighted our souls. We pondered and profited from them as we were trained and grew in understanding in our home. We were taught to seek diligently the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all things necessary would be added thereunto. We were taught that the laborer is worthy of his hire.

We were given great examples of service. I remember one time asking Dad why he spent so much time in Church service. What did he do but open the scriptures and turn to the 13th chapter of the Book of John, to that very great lesson the Savior was trying to teach His Twelve as He departed from them, when He knew it was His last period on earth, and He would have to leave them after such a short time of training. He was trying to imbue in them a desire to carry on the work and to accomplish all that they should accomplish. Then as the supper ended, He girded Himself with a towel. It was unique to me that this was before Judas had been excused, and He went to the feet of each of them. There He washed their feet and wiped them with a towel. When He came to Simon Peter, Peter said, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" And Jesus answered and said unto him, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Then Peter said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." And the Savior, wanting to teach a lesson, said, "If I wash thee not, thou has no part with me." Then Simon Peter wanted to be washed all over, not only his feet, but his hands and his head also.

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 caught 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 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
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 don't remember what happened after that. I know that I 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. As 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 terminates. 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
and counsel in the place of a bishop. His role is defined
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
value system, not something that has existed for
generations. They try to get them to think only of
trancequilizers 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.