

O Youth of the Noble Birthright

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God trusts you, the children of the covenant, to help with His work of bringing all His children safely home to Him.

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Elder Stevenson, this is a conference never to be forgotten.

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Our family has always enjoyed a little book called *Children's Letters to God*. Here are a few:

“Dear God, instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you've got right now?”

“How come you only have ten rules, but our school has millions?”

“Why did you put the tonsils in if you're just going to take them out again?”

Today there isn't time to answer all these questions, but there is another question I often hear from young people that I would like to address. From Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, to Thomas, Idaho, the question is the same: “Why? Why must Latter-day Saints live so differently from others?”

I know it's hard to be different—especially when you are young and want so badly for other people to like you. Everyone wants to fit in, and that desire is magnified to unhealthy proportions in today's digital world filled with social media and cyberbullying.

So, with all that pressure, why do Latter-day Saints live so differently? There are many good answers: Because you are a child of God. Because you have been saved for the last days. Because you are a disciple of Jesus Christ.

But those answers don't always set you apart. Everyone is a child of God. Everyone on earth right now was sent here in the latter days. And yet not everyone lives the Word of Wisdom or law of chastity the way you strive to. There are

many valiant disciples of Christ who are not members of this Church. But they do not serve missions and perform ordinances in houses of the Lord on behalf of ancestors like you do. There must be more to it—and there is.

Today I would like to focus on an additional reason that has been meaningful in my life. In 1988 a young Apostle named Russell M. Nelson gave an address at Brigham Young University called “Thanks for the Covenant.” In it, then-Elder Nelson explained that when we use our moral agency to make and keep covenants with God, we become heirs of the everlasting covenant God has made with our forebearers in every dispensation. Said another way, we become “children of the covenant.” That sets us apart. That gives us access to the same blessings our forefathers and foremothers received, including a birthright.

Birthright! You may have heard that word. We even sing hymns about it: “O youth of the noble birthright, carry on, carry on, carry on!” It’s a compelling word. But what does it mean?

In Old Testament times if a father passed away, his birthright son was responsible for the care of his mother and sisters. His brothers received their inheritance and left to make their way in the world, but the birthright son did not go anywhere. He would marry and have his own family, but he would stay until the end of his days to govern the affairs of his father’s estate. Because of this added responsibility, he was given an added measure of the inheritance. Was leading and caring for others too much to ask? Not when you consider the additional inheritance he was given.

Today we are not talking about your birth order in earthly families or Old Testament gender roles. We are talking about the inheritance you receive as a joint heir with Christ because of the covenant relationship you have chosen to enter with Him and your Father in Heaven. Is it too much for God to expect you to live differently than His other children so you can better lead and serve them? Not when you consider the blessings—both temporal and spiritual—that you have been given.

Does your birthright mean you are better than others? No, but it does mean you are expected to help others be better. Does your birthright mean you are chosen? Yes, but not chosen to rule over others; you are chosen to serve them. Is your birthright evidence of God’s love? Yes, but more important, it is evidence of His trust.

It is one thing to be loved and another thing entirely to be trusted. In the *For the Strength of Youth* guide, we read: “Your Father in Heaven trusts you. He has given you great blessings, including the fulness of the gospel and sacred ordinances and covenants that bind you to Him and bring His power into your life. With those blessings comes added responsibility. He knows you can make a difference in the world, and that requires, in many cases, being different from the world.”

Our mortal experience could be compared to a cruise ship on which God has sent all His children as they journey from one shore to another. The voyage is filled with opportunities to learn, grow, be happy, and progress, but it is also full of dangers. God loves all His children and is concerned about their welfare. He does not want to lose any of them, so He invites those who are willing to become members of His crew—that’s you. Because of your choice to make and keep covenants, He offers you His trust. He trusts you to be different, peculiar, and set apart because of the important work He trusts you to do.

Think of it! God trusts you—of all the people on the earth, the children of the covenant, His crew members—to help with His work of bringing all His children safely home to Him. No wonder President Brigham Young once said, “All the angels in heaven are looking at this little handful of people.”

When you look around on this cruise ship called earth, you might see other people sitting in lounge chairs drinking, gambling in casinos, wearing clothing that is too revealing, scrolling endlessly on cell phones, and wasting too much time playing electronic games. But instead of wondering, “Why can’t I do that?” you can remember that you are not an ordinary passenger. You are a member of the crew. You have responsibilities that passengers do not have. As Sister Ardeth Kapp once said, “You can’t be a life[guard] if you look like all the other swimmers on the beach.”

And before you become discouraged by all the extra obligations, please remember that crew members receive something the other passengers do not: compensation. Elder Neil L. Andersen has said, “There is a compensatory spiritual power for the righteous,” including “greater assurance, greater confirmation, and greater confidence.” - Like Abraham of old, you receive greater happi-

ness and peace, greater righteousness, and greater knowledge. Your compensation is not merely a mansion in heaven and streets paved with gold. It would be easy for Heavenly Father to simply give you all that He has. His desire is to help you become all that He is. Thus, your commitments demand more of you because that is how God is making more of you.

It's "a lot to ask of anyone, but you're not just anyone"! You are youth of the noble birthright. Your covenant relationship with God and Jesus Christ is a relationship of love and trust in which you have access to a greater measure of Their grace—Their divine assistance, endowment of strength, and enabling power. That power is not just wishful thinking, a lucky charm, or self-fulfilling prophecy. It is real.

As you fulfill your birthright responsibilities, you are never alone. The Lord of the vineyard labors with you. You are working hand in hand with Jesus Christ. With each new covenant—and as your relationship with Him deepens—you hold each other tighter and tighter until you are firmly clasped together. In that sacred symbol of His grace, you will find both the desire and the strength to live exactly how the Savior lived—differently from the world. You've got this because Jesus Christ has got you!

In 2 Nephi 2:6 we read, "Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth." Because He is full of truth, He sees you as you really are—flaws, weaknesses, regrets, and all. Because He is full of grace, He sees you as you really can be. He meets you where you are and helps you repent and improve, overcome and become.

"O youth of the noble birthright, carry on, carry on, carry on!" I testify that you are loved—and you are trusted—today, in 20 years, and forever. Don't sell your birthright for a mess of pottage. Don't trade everything for nothing. Don't let the world change you when you were born to change the world. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.