

A Plea to the Leadership of the Church: Choose Love Not Power

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ONE OF THE IRONIES OF MY LIFE is that I decided in 1963 to leave the Catholic church as it was becoming more open to join the Mormon church as it was becoming more closed. This irony has been brought home to me repeatedly during the past several general conferences. We have been told again and again by prominent general authorities that members who think or discuss unapproved or controversial religious ideas or who disagree with or dissent from the official church position, whether individually or in groups, are being contentious and should not be encouraged by church leaders at any level. We have also been told that criticism of leadership, however valuable in a secular context, is not to be tolerated within the church where leaders are chosen by God, speak for him, and can be trusted over alternate voices to impart the truth about doctrine, church governance, and the way to live in order to obtain the rewards of the celestial kingdom.

As I have listened to and later read these messages, I have concluded that the cumulative effect—whatever individual motives may be—is to facilitate exercise over the Saints of the very control, compulsion, and unrighteous dominion God forbids in church revelations (see D&C 121). In fact I felt more and more convinced that such ideas must be corrected or at least questioned. So I began making notes for this essay. As I did so I thought at first that I should address myself to all Mormons. For we are all—and I especially include myself—subject to the subtle, dangerous, and widespread temptation to control, coerce, manipulate, dominate, and compel others. But as I considered again the statements made in general conferences, I decided to address my remarks specifically to the Brethren—the general authorities of the church—as a group rather than as individuals. In doing this I speak principally for myself and possibly for those who feel as I do.

Brethren, I assume that my words will somehow be brought to your attention and that you will eventually read this plea. I know it is unusual for a lay member of the church to address you directly in public. I understand too that you may feel I am being presumptuous, inappropriate, and impertinent—though I do not wish to be. You may even be tempted to discipline me. Or you may decide to ignore me and relegate me to the ranks of those whose “basket shall not be full” and whose houses and barns “shall perish” (D&C 121:20). I fervently hope, Brethren, that you will do none of these things—even if what I say wounds your feelings or embarrasses you or causes you to feel anger. Please try to accept that I and others have had our feelings hurt by you, have been embarrassed by you, have been angered by you. Yet in spite of this, we continue to listen to you. Please listen in return. The time has come for us to stop talking past one another and to communicate directly with one another.

I am also aware, Brethren, that you are likely to brand these remarks, or even my desire to be heard, as contentious. Contention, you have repeatedly warned, is of the devil and should be avoided. But this is not really true; contention is not always evil. The apostle Paul writes, “at Philippi, we were bold . . . to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention” (1 Thess. 2:2). The scripture says that Michael the archangel contended with the devil over the body of Moses (Jude 1:9). To Isaiah the Lord said, “I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children” (49:25). And in D&C 90:36 we read: “I, the Lord, will contend with Zion, and plead with her strong ones, and chasten her until she overcomes and is clean before me.”

Contention is not evil if it means to plead, to argue, to bring forth strong reasons, or simply to contradict. This type of contention is an inevitable part of growth, of working through differences, of approaching harmony and truth. What the scriptures condemn as contention is not verbal disputation but physical violence or the creation of schisms in the church. In the Book of Mormon, “contention” usually means an armed skirmish or battle. We are told, for example, that Alma and “his guards, contended with the guards of the king of the Lamanites until he slew and drove them back” (Alma 2:33). Here contention means “combat” not argument. This is why it is so often coupled with “war,” as in “wars and contentions” (48:20). Jesus warns against the outbreak of such contention—or “conflict”—as a result of doctrinal disputes (3 Ne. 11:28-30). Doctrinal disputes should not lead to violence or divisions in the church. The point of Jesus’ teaching is that even if we cannot agree on doctrine or on the interpretation of scripture or on church policy or governance, we can at least avoid renouncing or rejecting or alienating those who disagree with us.

Contention aimed at uncovering truth or struggling toward unity is good, just as constructive criticism is good. It may involve hard words and

emotions and may necessitate cooling-off periods, but its purpose is benevolent. Contention aimed at dividing the church, at renouncing and rejecting as evil those who disagree with us, at rendering our opponents powerless, at dismissing them as inferior or worthless, or at inciting people to violent acts is not good, just as destructive criticism is not good. No matter how calmly and courteously it is advanced, its purpose is malevolent.

Brethren, before you judge those you think are contentious, ask yourselves if you are not also contentious? Who has divided the church into leaders and followers, intellectuals and mainstream members, believers and liberals, true voices and alternate voices, active Mormons and inactive Mormons? To label, renounce, stigmatize, or reject your fellow Saints because we disagree with you or cannot accept all you want us to accept is the kind of contention and divisiveness Jesus warned against. And not Jesus only. Joseph Smith said: "I will give you one of the Keys of the mysteries of the Kingdom. It is an eternal principle, that has existed with God from all eternity: That man who rises up to condemn others, finding fault with the Church, saying that they are out of the way, while he himself is righteous, then know assuredly, that that man is in the high road to apostasy; and if he does not repent, will apostatize, as God lives."¹ This famous statement, made by the prophet on 2 July 1839, is often quoted to members who are critical of you as a warning that criticism can lead to apostasy. But this twists the original meaning and purpose of the statement. Joseph Smith did not say these words to church members who were critical of their leaders. He said them to church leaders—to apostles and seventies—who were critical of church members. He warned leaders of the church not to put themselves above others, not to condemn others, not to find fault with the church, not to say that members are out of the way while leaders are righteous.

Brethren, you ignore this warning whenever you create, maintain, or reinforce categories of church membership or attempt to classify people as intellectuals, liberals, or dissidents. We all do it whenever we believe there are people whom we esteem as less valuable than ourselves, whose voices we do not have to hear—people who must listen to us but who have no right to be heard. We violate Joseph Smith's warning whenever we insist on the use of titles to distinguish leaders from followers. Did not Jesus instruct us not to call each other by titles? We are brothers and sisters, children of Christ. We are equals and our relationship to one another arises out of love not power. This is true even of our relationship to God, to whom we pray not by any title but in the name or by the name of Jesus.

We have been told to esteem our brothers and sisters as ourselves. This

1. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 156.

type of equality lies at the heart of the golden rule. Unfortunately, my experience in the church causes me to wonder: Do you Brethren believe the golden rule applies to you? Do you treat others as you would wish to be treated? Do you accord others the scope and privileges you claim for yourselves?

Brethren, please do not avoid these questions and admonitions simply because they may be couched in critical terms. Jesus did not put himself above his critics. Is it not a form of tyranny for you to forbid us from complaining about the quality of your leadership? Yes, we should not speak evil of you falsely. In fact we should not speak evil falsely of anyone. But I believe I have not spoken falsely of you—even if I have spoken bluntly. My criticism is meant to help rather than to harm you. In spite of this, I know that some may feel that these remarks are damaging—to my faith and to the faith of others. After all, you will say, if all this needed saying, we have a prophet to say it. The Lord would speak through his prophet and not suffer us to be lead astray. But, Brethren, this only means that the Lord has promised to remove a prophet who attempts to lead the church astray. It does not mean that we cannot go astray on our own, without being led. It does not mean that church leaders are always right and on the right course. It does not mean that we can be complacent, that we can simply turn the church over to a few men and never worry about it again. It does not mean that our leaders are above making mistakes and falling into errors and temptations. Prophets can be and have been wrong. Though Aaron was called by God, was it not he who built the golden calf? Did not Moses also make mistakes? He not only murdered an Egyptian and sought to govern Israel as an autocrat but was later forbidden to enter the promised land because he and Aaron had failed to trust in God in the wilderness of Zin (Num. 20:12; 27:13). Remember too that Peter, the chief apostle, not only denied Christ three times but could not find the courage to send the gospel to the gentiles for nearly twenty years after the Lord had told him to do so. Eventually the Holy Spirit, no longer willing to endure the intransigence of the church leadership, set apart Paul and Barnabas to commence this work. More recently Spencer W. Kimball and other general authorities failed to recognize that the “Salamander Letter,” the Joseph Smith III Blessing, and several other historical documents were forged.

My point is simply that prophets do not always speak as prophets. They can be wrong. This means that you cannot lay claim to infallibility. Nor can you forbid members from criticizing you, for that is tyranny. Nor can you claim superior spirituality or righteousness, for that is the kind of arrogance against which Joseph Smith warned. Nor can you claim to be those whom God will speak to first about important religious doctrines. When it came to the resurrection of the dead, undoubtedly the most important doctrine of the church, Jesus announced it first not to those who were the acknow-

ledged leaders but to women. This does not mean that you are not true prophets, only that you cannot claim to be unerring or preeminent among the Saints.

What you *can* claim is responsibility for watching over the flock of God, not as "lords over God's heritage, but as examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). You can be first in love, first to teach the gospel, first to reveal the ordinances of salvation and exaltation, first in the spiritual gifts, first to make open disclosure, first to confess sin, first to admit pride, first to hold out hope of salvation for the oppressed, the helpless, the weak, and the lost.

This is not the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Leaders. It is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The leadership of the church is not the church. It is an important part of the church—even an indispensable part. But so are the Saints. The scripture says that the head should not say to the foot, "I have no need of thee." But this is what the church institution says every time it asserts that leaders are more important, more valuable than non-leaders. It is the message we get from the way the church functions: leaders sit in council, preach in conference, lay down rules, while we members are there to soak it all up—and if we do this long enough and well enough, then perhaps we too, if we have been prudent and wise and male, may become leaders.

But the church should not be divided in this way. It should be a community of believers, a repository of spiritual gifts, where we rely on each other. When you do not rely on the spiritual gifts of members, you effectively deny those spiritual gifts. You do not deny their existence, of course, but you deny their operation as the driving force of the church. This happens when you refuse to accept the operations of the spirit that lie outside your control, as they are manifest among the members in their work places, in their study groups, and in their forums and symposia too. It happens when you reject the spirit as it shines through the unofficial publications to which members contribute.

The revelations teach that anyone who speaks when moved upon by the Holy Ghost speaks the mind and will of the Lord (D&C 68). This means that revelation does not come solely to those who sit in the church's highest councils but to those who meet together to comfort one another, support one another, love one another. Jesus said that where two or more are gathered in his name, he is in their midst (Matt. 18-20). He did not say that he would be only with two or more of the priesthood or of the righteous or of the mainstream. His statement is unqualified. People who gather in Christ's name are the people of Christ. This is the church in its most comprehensive sense. It may not be the divinely authorized church institution. But it is the Church of Jesus Christ, in any case, because he is in the midst of it. If this is so then Christ is with those of us who attend the Sunstone symposium in spite of our struggles, our doubts, our questions,

and our sins. He is with us every bit as much as he is with you Brethren in your councils, in spite of your struggles, your doubts, your questions, and your sins. And if God is for us, who can be against us? Who can say to the people of Christ, "You should not meet together or speak or question"? Such a prohibition seeks both to rob us of our freedoms of conscience, of religion, of speech, and of peaceable assembly—rights vouchsafed to us by God through men and women raised up and inspired for this very purpose—and it seeks to deny us the exercise of our spiritual gifts, whose existence and expression are crucial to the vitality of the church. As a friend of mine says, baptism washes away our sins not our rights. Nor in my view does it wash away our doubts, our questions, or our concerns. To proscribe such rights and blessings is to deny the power of God manifest in ordinary members.

Though the distinction between leader and member may help us to see our different functions in the body of Christ, they should not be used to determine our individual value to God or to the church. We are each equally valuable to God. And the value of each of us has been set by God in the person of Jesus Christ. He died for each of us. This means that each mortal is as valuable as God himself. We must deal with others as if each person were as valuable as our own person, as valuable as the person of God. This does not mean that we are to pretend to be equal in experience, understanding, wisdom, authority, health, agility, intelligence, or talents and gifts. But it does mean we are equal in value and dignity. No person, no matter how powerful, should treat another person, no matter how weak, any differently than he or she would be treated, any differently than she or he would treat someone he or she values and respects.

In my view the key to understanding Christ's admonitions about human relationships is to understand this concept of mutual and reciprocal esteem and dignity. Brethren, this means that it is not enough for you to say that you love us. People love their pets. They love their property. They love their slaves. What Christ requires of us is that we love each other as equals. He said, "A new commandment I give unto you that you should love one another as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (John 13:33-34).

How did Christ love us? He made himself equal to us, so that we could be made equal to him. The problem with us is that we are not equal. We are not equal in earthly things, so how can we expect to be equal in heavenly things? The gospel is the supreme message of mutual, reciprocal, symmetrical, divine love. The greatest makes himself or herself equal to the lowliest. Eve did this. Adam did this. Christ did this. Christ poured out his life for the least of his creations. He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He bore our iniquities and chastisement. With his stripes we are healed. He asks us to love one another as he loved us—not

counting himself more valuable than the least of us but esteeming the least of us as worthy to die for.

Brethren, do you love us as Christ loves us? Yes, you do love us. But too often there are strings attached to that love. I know you will be tempted to dismiss my words because of what you may call my "anger." But anger is not evil unless it is coupled with the desire or intent to do harm. My anger and the anger of other loyal Mormons is not motivated by hostility but by grief, sorrow, depression, helplessness. Our anger flares sometimes because it makes us feel less helpless and overwhelmed. But you must understand that both our anger and our depression are the same. They are both manifestations of our fear.

What are we afraid of? To tell you the truth, Brethren, many of us members are afraid of you, afraid that we will never be acceptable to you no matter what we think or say or do, no matter what we suffer or how deeply we believe. We are afraid you will never accept us or our sacrifices because they are not the ones you want. In other words we fear your conditional love. We want you to love us unconditionally. But you seem so reluctant to do this. The message of your conditional love is in nearly every speech you give. In our hearts we know that we can never meet all your conditions, all your standards, and also be true to our own spiritual experiences. We are afraid because we have been made to carry the burden of your narrow assumptions and inflated expectations. Believe me, Brethren, there are many who feel this way. Our anger rages quietly beneath a veneer of obedience and respectability. I believe Joseph Smith when he said, "There is one thing under the sun that I have learned and that is that the righteousness of man is sin, because it exacteth over much; nevertheless, the righteousness of God is just, because it exacteth nothing at all, but sendeth the rain on the just and the unjust, seed time and harvest, for all of which man is ungrateful."² Brethren, we are afraid because we feel that too often you have preached and imposed not the righteousness of God but your own righteousness.

Why must you exact from us "over much"? Why do you not love us unconditionally? Why will you not attend our gatherings and symposia? We do not want to attack you or ask you to endorse us. We need your love just as you need ours. Why divide us from you on the basis of who is in charge or who is right? Neither righteousness nor rightness nor authority can serve as the unifying principle of the church. The Pharisees believed that the people of God could be united on the principle of purity and righteousness, but this view led to elitism and intolerance. Catholics insisted that all Christians should unite around the authority of the Bishop of Rome, but this created the split between the Roman and Orthodox

2. *Ibid.*, 317.

churches. Protestants insisted that Christians unite around the right interpretation of scripture, but this only resulted in a scandal of schisms. Must we make the same mistakes? Christ revealed that the true unifying principle of the church is charity.

Though we have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and though we have all faith so that we could remove mountains, without charity we are nothing. We could give everything to the poor, but without charity it is an empty gesture. Charity is patient and kind, it does not envy, it does not strut or boast. It is not rude, self-serving, easily provoked, threatening, or malicious. Charity gives us unity and covers us. Brethren, no matter how we may disagree on doctrine, no matter how we may struggle with power and authority, we are one body. This means that in spite of our differences, we must love one another and hang on to one another and resist the temptation to renounce, reject, or alienate one another.

You may ask: Shall we not excommunicate dissidents and apostates? My answer is that if it can be proved by good evidence that someone is deliberately, willfully, and maliciously seeking to do palpable injury to a church member or to church property or to specifically defined relationships in which church members or church institutions are a party, then excommunication *may* be appropriate. But it is clearly wrong to oust or punish members just because they dissent or disagree. The church is no longer an infant. It has survived and will continue to survive differences of opinion.

Besides we all make mistakes. We all disobey. We are all sinners. The church is a hospital for sinners. It is not a museum for saints. You Brethren should not expect people to be perfect before you give them your love. We must love each other first, unconditionally, so that we can have the strength and courage to be made perfect. Some of you Brethren may not like this idea. You may feel it is not fair for sinners to be loved in the same way as the righteous. You are not happy that those who have labored eight hours get the same wage as those who worked only for a half an hour. So you are keen to create justice. You want to punish sinners so that they understand the gravity of their sins, so they know they cannot have the fun of sinning and then the reward of righteousness. But people who sin and recognize their sins know already that sin is not fun—it is terrible. Most of them are crying for a way out. The only people who do not understand the awfulness of sin are the self-deceived, the self-righteous, and the deranged.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that criminals should not be punished according to just laws and due process. But why punish sinners who are not criminals? Their sin is their punishment. Why not accept the fact that Jesus was punished for our sins and leave it at that? The great judgment has already taken place on Golgotha. Continuing judgment

can only alienate people seeking God's grace. Unity in spirit comes only through loving one another in spite of our sins. True we must all repent. But what we must repent of most is the sin of withholding our love from people we do not approve of. Of course we cannot be saved in our sins. But we can be loved in our sins and we can love in our sins. God who is sinless loved us while we were yet sinners. He loved the sinful world so much that he sent his own son into it to establish that each sinner is as valuable to God as Jesus Christ himself.

Brethren, why have you been so harsh with your conditional love? Never has the church had more obedient, faithful, tithe-paying members. Never have you had more respect, prestige, and power to do good. Why then are you not satisfied? You have been told that it is the weak things of the earth that shall break down the mighty. Can you then not rejoice in our weaknesses? Do you not realize that our weaknesses and our strengths are the same? It is our intelligence that makes us question. It is our love of freedom that makes us unmanageable. It is our passion that leads us to sin. It is our yearning for something beyond this world that makes us indifferent sometimes to convention. God has given us these weaknesses to make us humble. Why deplore them? Why despise us?

You seem not to trust us. But you want us to trust you. You want us to trust the bishops, stake presidents, mission presidents, and other leaders you have chosen. You want us to believe that you could and would do no wrong. If ever there is a dispute between a member and a leader, you believe that it is the leader who is right. But the truth is that you leaders are really no better than we Saints. But you seem not to accept this. And you continue to treat us as if we had no stake in the church at all.

Why do you hide information from us? Why do you keep from us the books and records of your dealings and minutes of your councils? Why do you tell us only those facts that make you look good? Why do you tell us only the success stories? Why do you not show us the liability side of your ledgers? Why do you refuse to tell us how much money the church has, how it is spent, and the nature and amount of losses and gains? How can you expect us to be open with you about our lives and finances, when you are not open with us about yours?

Why does the church have to have so much money? So much land? So much invested with the world? Is it because of your fear? Do you want the temporal power and influence of the church to shield us from the reproach of the world, to prove to our detractors that we are worthy of their praise? We were persecuted and driven out of seven states. Do you want to make sure it does not happen again? Is this why you want money in the bank, realty free and clear, stores of supplies, and friends in Washington, D.C.? But is it good to have so much of a stake in this world? Was it not God who allowed us to be persecuted? He could have stopped it. He can start it up

again at any time. His chastisement could have made us pure had we accepted it. But it hurt so much that we have vowed never to let it happen again. Because of the pain of the past, you seem determined to cut us off from our history, from Joseph Smith, from the nineteenth century with all of its doctrines and doings. You seem determined that we should assimilate completely into our modern American culture. I doubt that we have ever truly healed from the wounds of persecution, truly forgiven our persecutors, or truly forgiven our God for allowing these abuses to befall us.

Brethren, neither you nor we are blameless in this. We have all been too anxious to succeed in worldly terms. You should have corrected us. Instead you seem to promote our worldly success because you believe it reinforces the good image of the church. But a church with a good image is not the same as a good church. Your emphasis on earthly achievements, your infatuation with power, the fact that you see money as a sign of spiritual election, the church as a business, yourselves as its board of directors, and its product as a respected and respectable people—these are all signs of bad judgment. I know you do not like to have your judgment questioned. You like to think your judgment is the judgment of God. But it is not. You are flesh and blood as we are. And we have been told not to trust in the arm of flesh—even your flesh.

You may be thinking that I am ungrateful, that I do not understand the sacrifices you make and have made as general authorities, including the toll these callings have taken on your personal lives, your families, your opportunities, your personal wealth. After all, you say, "Why blame us? We didn't call ourselves." No, you did not call yourselves and, yes, you have made sacrifices for the church. You have sacrificed a great deal—but not your power, or your status, or your respectability. You project an image of yourselves as men who are perfect, while we are imperfect. You call the Saints to account, even publicly, but you rarely call each other to account and never publicly. You admit no mistakes. You seem never to repent. And you are not known to forgive often. You seem unable to accept the fact that you cause some of us pain. And you are tempted to punish those of us who cry out.

You yearly deliver patriotic speeches, but you do not provide any means whereby we may express our dissent. You do not take seriously or accept alternate voices. You do not let us participate in church governance unless we have been carefully screened and correlated. Nor do you account to us for your stewardships. You do not believe the high are accountable to the low. But Jesus did not teach this. He made himself accountable to his creations. He let himself be judged before he would judge.

The truth is that you are as afraid of us as some of us are of you. You think we will despise you because you are not perfect prophets, just as we fear that you will despise us because we are not perfect Saints. So we hide

behind a cloak of activity and respectability, while you hide behind walls of granite and move about in underground tunnels.

These are the signs of mutual fear not mutual love. This situation is our fault as much as it is yours. It is our fault that you are afraid to be real, personal, human. We have made you unapproachable. We have done this by sinning against you. Our sin is that we do not love you unconditionally. We expect you to be perfect, to always have the right answers, to never make a slip. If ever you do we lose our testimonies and make you feel responsible. But you are not responsible for what we believe, say, or do. You are only responsible for what you believe, say, or do. You should call us to account for our conditional love, even as I call you to account for yours.

Brethren, please, do not hide, do not threaten, do not punish, do not breathe out cursings. Do not hold secret councils or keep secret files. Do not look for scapegoats or resort to the silent treatment. Do not exercise control, compulsion, or unrighteous dominion. These are not answers. The answer to our mutual dilemma of conditional love is for all of us to repent, to forgive, and to love one another as Christ loves us. God is humble and meek. We know this because on the cross he showed us that he deals with us out of the divine weakness of love rather than out of the earthly strength of power. He wants us to be humble and meek too. To be humble is not to be subservient. It is to be unimpressed with oneself, one's calling, one's achievements, one's image, one's power, one's career, and one's future. To be meek is to see ourselves as we really are without our masks of respectability, infallibility, invulnerability, invincibility. But we are not meek. We are not humble. And you Brethren are partly responsible because you have not made these things clear.

My advice, Brethren, is this: Choose love not power. Do not hide behind your authority or your masks of solemnity, severity, and composure. Do not cling to your privacy. It is not healthy for you to have both power and privacy. Lay aside worldly prudence and wisdom. Do not group think. Do not group speak. Do not repress your best spiritual instincts in order to be good team players. Do not calculate so much or rely so much on statistics. Do not flatter or succumb to flattery. Reveal yourselves. Do not be ashamed. His grace is sufficient to cover you. And especially do not be ashamed that your revelations and contacts with God are no better or more frequent than our own. Do not be afraid of women or of their claims. Recognize that they are your equals in every way. Do not clone yourselves by picking leaders who are identical to you in the way they think, speak, dress, and view the world. Do not concern yourselves with being respected or respectable. These are not the same as holiness. True religion has never been respectable. If you are laughed at, laugh along. If you are criticized, search your souls.

Jesus did not say, "count my sheep." He said, "feed my sheep." Do not shun the needy, the weak, the oppressed. Love the wretched, the idle, those

who are not like you. Exalt the poor. Live with them. Give away more. You need not agonize over whether the resources of the church will be exhausted by all the poor, the irresponsible, the unwashed. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. He will provide. Be generous and you will find your baskets full of fish and loaves and grain, and hidden in the grain will be gold besides. Do not be afraid of the unworthy. They are more like you than you think. Remember if your enemy asks for your cloak, give her or him your coat also. If he or she wants you to go a mile, go with him or her two miles. Do not think about what you will eat or wear or how your families will be provided for. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they toil not neither do they spin. Yet Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed as one of these. These words, as you know, were not spoken to all the disciples, but they were spoken to the twelve, to the seventy. Accept them.

Brethren, you possess the keys of the kingdom. They were given to you to hold in trust for us, not only for the Saints of the church but for the people of the Lord everywhere. Use them for our sakes. With them open the doors of your councils. Open the archives of the past. Open the records of your dealings. Open the treasuries of the church. Open the scriptures and expound them. Open your mouths in blessings. Open your hands in generosity. Open your eyes. Open your ears. Open your minds. And above all open your hearts.

I have been both blunt and bold, but I am not without respect. That I have addressed you directly means that I believe you will receive bravely what I have said without rancor. With God's grace we can all begin to appreciate each other's differences, accept them, even celebrate them, and, without obliterating them, transcend them. It is not too late to rid ourselves of narcissism, elitism, exclusivity, superficiality, rigidity, pride, authoritarianism, self-righteousness, and fear. The church will not be overthrown by the revelation of our weaknesses. It will be strengthened by it. The weak through love shall conquer the strong. The church will endure. It is not too late to make the church a refuge, a "safe place," where every Saint is a leader and every leader is a saint, a place where we may all put off our masks of pretense and live in openness, in vulnerability, in health, in wholeness, in peace. This is the end and purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its restoration through Joseph Smith.

Why then should we tarry? Let us get on with what must be done. Let us repent and forgive. Let us be fearless. Let us be full of faith, hope, and charity. And let us ever bear in our hearts the conviction that if we will but love all people without pretense, without fear, without condition, with perfect, symmetrical, and reciprocal esteem, the church will never fail. And the gates of hell will not prevail against us.