

“Jesus Christ, the Rock upon Which We Must Build”

ELDER BEN B. BANKS
Of the Presidency of the Seventy

This address was given, at the 2002 BYU Women’s Conference

© 2002 by Brigham Young University,
Women’s Conference
All rights reserved.

For further information write:

BYU Women’s Conference,
352 Harman Continuing Education Building,
Provo, Utah 84602.
(801) 422-7692

E-mail: womens_conference@byu.edu
Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

I am grateful for the assignment to be with you today at this BYU Women’s Conference. I am honored and humbled that I would be asked to speak here. During my life I have benefited from the example of many great sisters. In fact, the two people who have had the greatest effect on my life have been my mother and my wife.

My wonderful mother, Chloa Berry Banks, became a widow in 1934 at the age of thirty-nine. I was just two years old when my father, Ben F. Banks, was critically injured in a construction accident. Within a month he had passed away, leaving my mother to single-handedly rear seven children.

As I look back now, I realize what an incredible example of courage in action my mother was. With her father’s help, she acquired some old rental units in Salt Lake City. Mom led our fatherless family to renovate those units. She handled many of the repairs herself, fixed the plumbing and electrical systems, painted, and decorated. She even hauled the coal for heating, and rented the properties. Her actions literally saved our family.

My wife, Sue, and I will celebrate our fiftieth wedding anniversary in June. I remember very clearly what my mother said to my new bride on our wedding day in June 1952. Mom turned to Sue and said, “I’ve raised him for the first part of his life; I now turn him over to you to raise him for the rest of his life.”

I have watched Sue serve our seven sons and one daughter, twenty-five grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren. I have realized how much the gospel of Jesus Christ has

blessed our life together and our family. You would also be interested to know that she has carried out my mother's assignment with zeal and dedication.

I constantly try to emulate the example set by these two wonderful women by their constant living of the principles of the restored gospel.

The theme of this year's BYU Women's Conference, taken from the Book of Mormon, summarizes one verse of scripture that we must learn to live by if we are to overcome by faith the challenges we all face in mortality. In Helaman we read: "Remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall" (Helaman 5:12).

Helaman's timeless counsel to his sons more than two thousand years ago instructs us that, as followers of the Savior, we must build our foundation on Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, if we are to avoid becoming trapped in Satan's "gulf of misery and endless wo." In today's terms, that sounds very much like the symptoms of guilt, depression, and despondency.

During our lifetime, Satan's temptations will come upon us as "winds," "hail," or a "mighty storm." Why? To make us miserable like unto himself. How we deal with that assault will determine our happiness both now and hereafter.

Many have to cope with opposition and hardship in their lives. There is nothing new about this, and yet our hardships are very different from those faced by the early Church members 150 years ago.

Today I would like to share with you a snapshot of pioneer life from the writings of Sarah Ann Jackson, a pioneer member of the Church from Britain. [1](#) Sarah was born to John and Alice Jackson on September 25, 1863, in Accrington, Lancashire. Her father, John, full of faith, joined the Church at the age of fifteen. Some years later he was called with his wife to serve a mission in the city of Hull when Sarah was just four years old. Following the call, Sarah, her mother, Alice, and her father, John, walked 120 miles across the Pennine Hills of England to east Yorkshire, where John served his mission and became president of the Hull Conference. About a year into the mission, John developed appendicitis and died, leaving his wife and daughter penniless and alone.

Bereft of funds and family and pregnant with twins, Alice and her daughter, Sarah Ann, gathered their few belongings and walked back across those same hills, this time to Liverpool to join the Saints leaving for America. They arrived in time to join the USS Constitution, sailing on June 24, 1868. Six long and terrible weeks, the rocking ship, and Alice's condition all made for a very poor journey, as you can imagine. Four-year-old Sarah was her mother's sole nurse and constant companion.

During one very bad storm, Alice and Sarah had to wrap their legs around the mast to save themselves from being washed overboard. The sea captain is reported to have said that “if the ship had not been full of Mormons, it would have sunk!”

Eventually they arrived in New York and then traveled by railroad to Benton, Wyoming. As the time was approaching to give birth to her twins, Alice set out to walk the remaining 694 miles to Salt Lake City with four-year-old Sarah Ann. Day after day Alice would walk until her strength gave out, and then she would be lifted into a wagon and travel until she could no longer stand the jolting. She would then get out of the wagon and start to walk all over again. Sarah Ann later said that she remembered day after day dragging on.

The twins were born on the plains, but Sarah Ann’s excitement at having siblings was short-lived, as both of them passed away within a few days of birth. With determination and faith, Alice and Sarah Ann continued on foot, arriving in Salt Lake City on September 15, 1868.

Both Alice and Sarah Ann had endured much on their journey. Both had reason to “mourn or think [their] lot is hard,” [2](#) but both continued in the faith until the time of their passing many years later.

Women of great faith always share the same hallmark—they never give up in times of adversity. They know who they are, and they know where safety is found. Jesus Christ is their foundation of faith.

If someone came along today and took a snapshot of your modern life, what would it show? Today we do not face the same challenges as our pioneer forefathers faced. Our challenges are different. Our challenge may come in the form of helping a family member cope with drug or alcohol abuse, rebellion, a weak testimony or struggling with feelings of inadequacy, depression, and self-doubt; it could even come in handling the pain of divorce or in the suffering that comes from serious ill health.

But just like the pioneers of old, our eyes have to remain firmly fixed on the Savior and His gospel. As we cross the plains of life and bear whatever we are called upon to bear, we can overcome Satan and render him powerless, if we build our lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Mormon teaches us that “men [and women] are that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25).

The Lord declared to Moroni: “If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

We cannot build our foundation on Jesus Christ if we do not know Him. That knowledge comes as we “press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end.” And He gives us this promise: “Behold, thus saith the Father, Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20).

The action of pressing forward was reinforced by the risen Lord when He said to the Nephite Saints and to us: “I am the . . . light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Nephi 15:9).

The Savior’s admonition to come unto Him, press forward, look to Him, feast upon His words, and endure to the end all require us to do something.

I would like to mention one more thing that will help in our quest to build our foundation on the Savior. Moroni summed this up when he said: “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness” (Moroni 10:32).

If we truly want a solid foundation built on the Savior, we have to deny ourselves of all manner of ungodliness. We need to be living examples of the Savior in thought and in word and in action. This requires of us to live the law of sacrifice.

You sisters can have a great influence upon those around you—especially family members, as Sister Nadauld said. Children look to their mothers, grandmothers, and ward members for guidance. They look to you. They watch what you watch; they speak the way you speak: their standards often derive from your standards. We can do so much good by simply keeping the commandments and quietly living the gospel.

Cast your mind back for a moment and think about how many times you have heard individuals older than yourself talk about how wicked the world is becoming. They say, “It wasn’t like that when I was young,” and we laugh and joke about how times have changed.

But the stark reality that we face is that times really have changed.

Our world today, more than ever before, needs more temples—not just the physical temples that are being built throughout the world but the spiritual temples of which Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:16). The prophet today is doing his part to build more sanctuaries from the storms of life. Are we, similarly, making the temples of our bodies worthy receptacles of the Holy Ghost?

We need better prepared missionaries from homes that have a mother’s righteous influence, missionaries with a sure foundation who have “been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:47). Never before in the history of this world has there been a need for more valiant mothers, more faithful Latter-day Saint women who influence for good in their homes. You sisters and mothers are entitled to inspiration.

Would you allow me to share a personal story of my wife's wonderful influence on one of our sons and how inspiration came to her? Many years ago while I was serving as a bishop, I was away early Sunday morning to a bishop's meeting. My wife's responsibility was to wake the boys for priesthood meeting. One son, seventeen at the time, had been out later than he should have been Saturday evening. As Sue made the rounds, she said to him, "If you get up now you will have time to shower and have breakfast before priesthood meeting." Our son kind of groaned and moaned and turned over in his bed and said, "Mom, I'm too tired to go to priesthood meeting. I will get up later and go to sacrament meeting, but I am not going to priesthood meeting this morning."

My wife knew she was not strong enough to wrestle our seventeen-year-old son out of bed. She didn't know what to do. She went into the adjoining room and pondered how she might get him out of bed, knowing where he should be. The answer came to her. She walked back into his room, grabbed the covers, pulled them off him, and said, "Okay, if you are not going to church this morning, neither am I. Move over."

She crawled into bed beside him and cuddled up to him.

That lasted for about ten seconds!

He threw back the covers and said, "Okay, Mom, I'll go to priesthood meeting."

She never ever from that day had a problem getting any of the boys out of bed in time for priesthood meeting. Years later that same son, while working in Washington, D.C., as an attorney in the Justice Department and also serving in a bishopric, in a phone conversation with his mother said, "Mom, you can't believe how hard it is to get these young men in our ward to get up in time for priesthood meeting."

His mother said, "Be patient, son. Remember how you were as a teenager."

He said, "Oh, Mom, I was never like that."

How quickly we forget.

On January 1, 2000, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, as special witnesses of Jesus Christ, issued a remarkable proclamation to the members of the Church and to the world entitled "The Living Christ." In their historic statement, they testify He is "the light, the life, and the hope of the world." [3](#)

What applies universally to all mankind applies specifically and personally to each one of us. He is our Advocate with the Father. He is our Redeemer. He is our Savior.

The way to happiness and a sure foundation is simple. After baptism and reception of the Holy Ghost, we are admonished to—

1. Put our confidence and trust in Him completely. We cast our burdens on Him.
2. Look to Him in faith. Feast on His words and trust them.
3. Repent of unworthy thoughts and any behavior that draws us away from a righteous life.
4. Renew our promises and covenants with Him each week.
5. Pray daily to be worthy to have the Holy Ghost to guide us.

Sisters, we cannot be an influence for good if we treat these principles of peace casually. Faith built on this sure foundation will bring peace into our lives regardless of our circumstances.

It would be good for us to remember the lesson taught by the Lord about the simpleness of His way. Remember how the Lord sent fiery serpents among the children of Israel as they journeyed in the wilderness and then prepared a way for their escape? All they had to do was to look upon the serpent on the pole and they would be immediately healed. Here is the lesson to us: “Because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished” (1 Nephi 17:41). Likewise, many today experience failure and difficult challenges because they will not build on the simple foundation of Jesus Christ and His commandments.

I am reminded of an incident recorded in Matthew: “And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind [him], and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour” (Matthew 9:20–22).

She had the simple faith that all she had to do was touch the hem of the Savior’s garment. She applied that faith and put it into action. The Savior confirmed that her faith had made her whole.

Let us not forget that her faith in a loving Savior made that miracle possible.

The scriptures and modern prophets bear witness why we must place our faith in Jesus Christ:

We know that all of us are in a lost and fallen condition without Him (1 Nephi 10:6; Mosiah 16:4–9; Alma 34:9; Ether 3:2).

Only He has the power to redeem us (Alma 34:8–10, 13–17).

He is our advocate with the Father (D&C 45:1–8; 35:1–2; 8–12).

Because of these truths, there are many blessings we obtain when we center our faith and hope in Christ:

We know our hearts can be changed (Mosiah 5:2).

We can obtain knowledge and great joy (Mosiah 5:3–4).

Our weaknesses can become our strengths because we rely on Him (Ether 12:4; 26–27).

His grace will be sufficient to bring us to a state of holiness if we place our confidence and trust in Him (Moroni 10:32–33; D&C 93:1).

“A classic story of meeting adversity with a winning attitude is the account of the burning of Thomas A. Edison’s laboratories,” says Elaine Cannon in her book *Adversity*. She writes the following:

“A spontaneous explosion occurred and others quickly spread, in dramatic repetition of the first burst, moving across the film processing plant through freight cars and on to ignite alcohol storage tanks that sent fantastic towers of flames into the air.

“Water pressure failed, and the fire was soon out of control. It was a spectacular fire! Edison sent for his wife, telling her to bring all her friends because they’d never see anything like this fire again.

“Later, when Edison surveyed the blackened ruins of a lifetime of effort, he turned to his discouraged associates and said, ‘You can always make capital out of disaster. Now we are rid of a lot of our past mistakes.’

“He was sixty-seven at the time and began rebuilding the plant before the last ember was finally subdued on the old ruin.

“He could have given up. Instead he proved that youth doesn’t have the only handle on growth and that preachers aren’t the only people who understand hope. Besides, if adversity helps us get rid of past mistakes, we need it!” [4](#)

I want to conclude my remarks today with words from the hymn “How Firm a Foundation,” particularly verses 4 through 7, which we seldom ever sing:

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not thee o’erflow,
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

E’en down to old age, all my people shall prove
My sov’ reign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And then, when gray hair shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs shall they still in my bosom be borne.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake! [5](#)

Now dear sisters, please go forward with simple faith. Ensure that your foundation and that of your family is built on the sure rock of our Savior, even Jesus Christ. Stand fast against all forms of ungodliness. Remember where to turn when you face trials.

Remember that many of those trials come from the adversary, whose sole objective is to have you be as miserable as he is.

Recently while accompanying Elder Neal A. Maxwell on an assignment and training meeting to a group of stake presidencies and their auxiliary presidents, I heard him say there are three kinds of experiences or trials we have in this life: (1) those common to mankind; (2) those self-inflicted; and (3) the individual tutorials Heavenly Father gives to us to test us and help us grow.

Sisters, I truly commend you for your goodness and your influence upon your individual family and the families of this Church. I pray that each of us here today may have a renewed determination to make the Savior our sure foundation. As we do, we will find a renewing and invigorating experience awaiting us. I testify that as you build on a firm foundation, you will enjoy the surety of the Savior's influence in your life. It will bring you the peace that so many in this world seek after and do not seem to find. Of that I bear testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

[1](#) Darlene Cadaster Hutchinson, "Three Women of Faith," 10–20.

[2](#) Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 30.

[3](#) "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," Ensign, April 2000, 2.

[4](#) Elaine Cannon, Adversity (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 22–23. Hymns, no. 85.

[5](#) Hymns, no. 85.