

## **“Heed Them Not” Heidi S. Swinton**

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at the BYU Women’s Conference  
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Sisters, to the many faithful voices we have heard at this conference I add my own in the simplest of terms: “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.”<sup>1</sup> I love that phrase. I believe it to the core of who I am. For years it has been the centerpiece of my testimony in the hardest times—and the best of times.

Early in my writing career I compiled the book, “I Know That My Redeemer Lives,”<sup>2</sup> the testimonies of our Savior Jesus Christ given by latter-day prophets. That project—which I recently updated to include our most recent presidents—changed my life and my trajectory. What I learned is that no matter the quandary or concern, no matter the voices calling out saying—you’re missing it, you’re deluded, or “I thought you were smarter than that,” my believing and knowing that Jesus Christ is always the answer, always the source of strength, always our refuge and our example was and is enough.

I believe to my very core what the hymn says:

“He lives who once was dead.  
He lives, my ever-living head,  
He lives to calm my troubled heart, (*I love that phrase*)  
He lives, all blessings to impart.”<sup>3</sup>

Of those blessings President Russell M. Nelson has taught, “In a coming day, you will present yourself before the Savior. You will be overwhelmed to the point of tears to be in His holy presence. You will struggle to find words to thank Him for paying for your sins, for forgiving you of any unkindness toward others, for healing you from injuries and injustices of this life. You will thank Him for strengthening you to do the impossible, for turning your weaknesses into

strengths, and for making it possible for you to live with Him and your family forever. His identity, His Atonement, and His attributes will become personal and real to you.”<sup>4</sup>

How do we have Jesus Christ become real to us? How do we “heed not” those yapping at our heels? How do we go from reading the words of the scriptures to actually hearing Him? How do we step up to a higher and holier way of living in a world that thinks—this is it! We take to heart the revelation to Emma Smith, “Lay aside the things of this world and seek for the things of a better.”<sup>5</sup>

Consider Father Lehi’s vision of standing by the tree early in the Book of Mormon. Lehi described being alone in a “dark and dreary waste”<sup>6</sup>—many of us have been there—and seeing a man in white who beckoned him to follow. He did. And came to “a tree whose fruit was desirable to make one happy.”<sup>7</sup> The tree was Jesus Christ and the fruit was the all-encompassing Atonement of our Lord and Savior.

“As I partook of the fruit,” Lehi explains, “it filled my soul with exceeding great joy; wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also.”<sup>8</sup> He cast his eyes about seeing his wife Sariah and sons Sam and Nephi a little way off. He “beckoned unto them...crying out with a loud voice”<sup>9</sup> that they should come and partake of the fruit, the blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. And they came.

Then he spotted Laman and Lemuel and called them to come, but they would not. They were prideful perhaps, stubborn, for sure, and misguided in their direction. Lehi also saw in his dream multitudes who were “pressing forward,” some grasping the iron rod, some making it to the tree and even partaking of the fruit but then casting their eyes about as if they were ashamed.”<sup>10</sup> And they were lost.

Lehi did not leave the tree. He did not race out to fetch his wandering sons or give place to the grievances being shouted at him. He didn’t shy away from the finger pointing of those who scoffed at the fruit they did not desire. Was he ashamed of his commitment? Was he drawn off by those who seemed to have all the trappings of success? With perhaps more mortal acclaim? More followers on social media, more posts from admirers? Did he succumb to the false narratives of the adversary that commandments are restrictive and prophets are out-of-touch?

The tree stood in stark contrast to the great and spacious building with all its glamour, opulence, and appeal. I imagine it had the latest in architecture, the latest in glass and balconies, fronted by a river, murky and choppy at best, but still waterfront property. You get the picture. The building housed the adversary’s key weapons—his minions mocking, attacking, intimidating, and rebuking those who stood by the tree, by Jesus Christ. I love Lehi’s cryptic comment, “*We heeded them not.*”<sup>11</sup>

He believed the Lord’s promise, “Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my father.”<sup>12</sup> Aging steel girding and smudged windows in the great and spacious building are no match with mansions by the Father.

What is significant today is that the skeptics from the great-and- spacious building are growing more shrill, more strident, and less tolerant. Sometimes their charges stick in our heads with those same-old, same old—you are pathetic, you aren't worth much, nobody likes you. Don't you believe it.

There was an era when most people adhered to some measure of God's commandments. But the current prevailing views and philosophies are more interested in being politically correct than God-fearing, more in-tune with the trends, than anxiously engaged, more afraid of being called out or ridiculed than preparing to stand and "walk in the light of the Lord."<sup>13</sup>

The account of the Ten Virgins is all about light. You know the story-- the ten virgins prepare to meet the bridegroom who is Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup> When he comes, five are wise with extra oil to light their lamps – in other words, light for their very souls – and the other five are foolish and must race out to Walmart for more oil. But you can't buy it. It is stored up in your righteous and believing heart. The Lord corrected the parable through Joseph Smith's translation of portions of the Bible. The conclusion is not the Lord saying, "I know you not,"<sup>15</sup> but "You know me not."<sup>16</sup>

Sobering thought isn't it. He knows—if we truly know Him—or if we have chosen to sidle off, slink off, stepping away from the tree. If we know Him, nothing being offered by the noisy world will draw us off.

For the ever-present battle for our hearts—yours and mine—He offers safety in the storms, courage and compassion in the turmoil, truth as it really is, and the Atonement to lift us when we slip. Jesus Christ made it clear, "The world passeth away but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."<sup>17</sup>

That's what this last dispensation is all about. The fulness of the gospel is divinely designed by the Father that we may return to Him; the commandments and doctrine are to help us grow closer and closer to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. The Atonement is to make us worthy to go all the way home. This is not a Sunday church. Our covenant at baptism is to always take the name of Jesus Christ upon us – and then do what? Become like Him. That means a mighty change of heart, receiving His image in our countenances<sup>18</sup> and worrying less about the world around us and more about what the Lord calls "worlds without number."<sup>19</sup>

The Restoration opened the heavens. Listen to the profound yet personal testimony of Joseph Smith, Jr., "I had actually seen a light and in the midst of that light I saw two personages who did in reality speak to me. And though I was hated and persecuted for saying I had seen a vision, yet it was true. . . I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it."<sup>20</sup>

Hated and persecuted – that's just what happened. All that calamity and abuse was hurled at him but still the gospel took hold that we- - all of us here – might "walk in [the] light of the Lord."<sup>21</sup> Joseph stood firm in his ministry stating, "It mattereth not whether the principle is popular or unpopular, I will always maintain a true principle, even if I stand alone in it."<sup>22</sup> Do we? Or are those screaming at us from the wings as if they had a right to center stage drawing us off one catcall at a time?

Think of the many times you have taken your cause of hurt and mistreatment to the Lord in prayer. Joseph pleaded with the Lord from Liberty Jail for relief and the answer came, “Hold on thy way.”<sup>23</sup> Today we call that “way” the Covenant Path. The answer is “Hold On.”

In his ministry, Joseph was hounded, abused by the friendly fire of those who had left the Church; rejected, tarred, and feathered, jailed, and eventually murdered. Lucifer is still not through tormenting Joseph conjuring up distractions, deceptions, and deceits. He continues to beat the drum on the internet, in forums, books, and bully pulpits to dissuade people from believing Joseph saw God, from believing Joseph was called of God, and God knew his name.

When Joseph was asked by a reporter how he would describe himself as a prophet, he replied, “I am a lover of the cause of Christ... [and of] an upright steady course of conduct and holy walk.”<sup>24</sup> Such a simple yet sincere and powerful way to describe those of us who are committed disciples of our Lord.

Our society has been overrun by calling good evil and evil good. Who hasn’t faced taunts and challenges from others and then sometimes out of fear or personal doubt questioned the ground where we stand? The adversary has launched an attack on women and framed motherhood as “the worst of times.” Today’s clothing styles mock virtue and modesty; media promotes the famous flaunting their errant lifestyles; television and film display crass conduct and constantly take the name of the Lord in vain; the unborn are willingly cast aside; and alternative choices to the divine institution of marriage are heralded as enlightened. These voices are boisterous and crave center stage. Were Samuel the Lamanite here he would call from the wall, heed not the “foolish and blind guides” reveling in “darkness rather than light.”<sup>25</sup>

Heed them not.

The Lord has said, “Come unto me in every thought. Doubt not. Fear not.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus Christ is our refuge from incoming attacks, and our strength to stand strong, to square our shoulders and trust him and his ways. Completely. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart,” it says in Proverbs, “in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”<sup>27</sup>

How do we do that? How do we stand by the Lord, Jesus Christ and heed his promptings? Easy to say—not always easy to do.

When writing President Thomas Monson’s biography, I asked him if there was a singular moment in his life that taught him how to follow the Lord and his ways.

Not surprising, he responded with a story.

He was a newly called bishop, just 22 years old, when a young man in his ward called him at work one afternoon. The youth explained his uncle with whom he was living had just been rushed by ambulance to the hospital. He made his nephew promise to call the bishop and tell him his uncle needed to talk to him right away.

“How soon can you go see him,” the boy asked urgently.

Bishop Monson said, “I’ll go tonight.”

But first he had to attend a stake meeting. All the Bishops were sitting on the stand; in the sight-line of everyone in the congregation. The Stake President was the first speaker and as he talked, Bishop Monson heard a prompting, “Get up right now and go to the hospital.”

He looked around. “Get up right now and leave in front of all these people?” he said to himself. “Walk out while the Stake President is talking? What will people think of me?”

He stayed in his seat.

As the next speaker was giving his message, the prompting came again, “Get up right now and go to the hospital.” Again, Bishop Monson looked around and responded, “What will people think?” And he stayed in his seat.

Not until the closing hymn did, he get out of his seat, beeline it down the aisle, out to his car, and up the hill to the hospital. He raced in the front door, asked for the room number, took the stairs to the third floor, and rushed down the hall to where a nurse was standing outside a door. She looked at him and said, “You must be Bishop Monson.” He nodded. Then she pointed to the man in the bed inside the room and said, “He was calling for you – right before he died.”

Bishop Monson didn’t make it. He was drawn off from the Lord’s errand by seeming peer pressure, fear of how he would be viewed, what people would say – “Did you hear Bishop Monson walked out in the middle of the meeting!”

President Monson, all these years later, looked soberly at me and said, “That lesson was not lost on me.”<sup>28</sup>

What was the lesson? Hearken to the voice of the Spirit and always be on the Lord’s errand.

Elder B. H. Roberts, more than a century ago, had it right when he said, “The man [or woman] who so walks in the light and wisdom and power of God will at the last by the very force of association make the light and wisdom and power of God his own.”<sup>29</sup>

Not long ago I was sitting in sacrament meeting when we prepared to sing, I Stand all Amazed.<sup>30</sup> I was not in a good place that day. I was broken-hearted for challenges thrown at me by someone I loved and the new path they had chosen. They had succumbed to “lo here and lo there”<sup>31</sup> which I know leads -- nowhere. Was I going to abandon what I believed to keep the association? I had prayed mightily for help and peace but the battle for my soul raged on.

So, we started to sing and half-heartedly I joined in. And then we came to the second verse and words I had sung seemingly hundreds of times suddenly filled my heart and soul. These words: “and for me. . . he suffered, he bled and died.”<sup>32</sup> Time stopped at that moment.

The resolution to my sadness was Jesus Christ. He wasn't just the Savior that day; he was MY Savior. He had felt my current pain, he had taken it upon Himself in a darkening garden as part of the Father's plan. For me and my suffering – he had knelt and suffered, bled and died “that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.”<sup>33</sup> He had “descended below all things,”<sup>34</sup> that means every bad day, darkness and disappointment or even despair, every form of sickness or rejection, attacks and disdain from others, and disregard for our covenants and our standards. That day, I could feel him saying to me, “I've got this.” It was as we read in Philippians, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”<sup>35</sup>

We know Jesus Christ is described as the Prince of Peace. Can that mean He is the Prince of Peace for us personally? I know so. He said to his disciples that night in the Upper room, “My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you not as the world giveth, give I unto you, let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid.”<sup>36</sup> That scripture has brought me peace since I stood at the grave of my oldest son forty-seven years ago. He was born too early and his twin brother fought for his life for months. The wrenching in my heart, the longing for this little boy, the desire to raise up a righteous family was suddenly eclipsed by a life that lasted only twenty-two hours. Standing in the cemetery I saw the weeping of my family and friends who felt the sorrow and even unfairness of the moment. But I felt the Spirit of the Lord come over me and remind me of the sealing promise. We would be together. I had to “be strong and of good courage”<sup>37</sup> though my heart was breaking. I had one-all the way home to His Father in Heaven. We are here for just that purpose. “My peace I leave with you – not as the world giveth”<sup>38</sup> – has rested in my heart all these years.

Peace is not in short supply if we turn to the Savior.

So how do we stand by the tree—our Lord and Savior—in a world filled with tall buildings and people who call out that they have it all?

We hearken to the teachings and assurances of our latter-day prophets. The Lord has stated, “Whether by mine own voice or the voice of my servants it is the same.”<sup>39</sup> Do we think they are talking not to us but to someone else? Probably. Do we worry the doctrine they teach is not always politically correct? Maybe. Are they calling for us to listen, come stand with them by the tree? Absolutely. Here's how:

### **Stay Close to the Savior.**

From Elder Quentin L. Cook: “Lucifer seeks to undermine the Father's plan and destroy faith in Jesus Christ and His doctrine. The assault on the Bible and the divinity of Jesus Christ has never been more pronounced in my lifetime than it is today. As Helaman taught, ‘Remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation.’”<sup>40</sup>

### **Follow the Living Prophet and the Lord's Apostles**

From Elder Ronald A. Rasband: “We are distinguished as a Church to be led by prophets, seers, and revelators called of God for this time. I promise that as you listen and follow their counsel, you will never be led astray. Never!”<sup>41</sup>

### **Honor the Name of Jesus Christ**

From Elder Dale G. Renlund: “At baptism and when we partake of the sacrament, we witness that we are willing to take on ourselves the name of Jesus Christ... You should not identify yourself as a disciple of Jesus Christ unless you intend to represent Him well.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Hold on to What You Know to be True**

From Elder Jeffrey R. Holland: “In moments of fear or doubt or troubling times, hold the ground you have already won, even if that ground is limited...hold fast to what you already know and stand strong until additional knowledge comes.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Listen to the Promptings of the Spirit**

From President Henry B. Eyring: The Lord says that as we continue to be faithful, the Holy Ghost will dwell in us. That is the promise in the sacramental prayer that the Spirit will be our companion and that we will feel, in our hearts and minds, His comfort.<sup>44</sup>

### **Recognize and Accept the Will of God in Your Life**

From Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf: Every dispensation has faced its times of trial and hardship. Enoch and his people lived in a time of wickedness, wars, and bloodshed. “But the Lord came and dwelt with his people He had something unimaginable in mind for them. He helped them establish Zion—a people “of one heart and one mind” who “dwelt in righteousness.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Seek Answers to Our Questions from the Lord Himself and from Those Who Bear Witness of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ**

From President Nelson: “Take your questions to the Lord and to other faithful sources. Study with the desire to believe rather than with the hope that you can find a flaw in the fabric of a prophet’s life or a discrepancy in the scriptures. Stop increasing your doubts by rehearsing them with ... doubters. Allow the Lord to lead you on your journey of spiritual discovery.”<sup>46</sup>

Sisters, we must not be casual in hearkening to the doctrine and teachings of the Lord. We challenge the powers of darkness when we heed not but instead seek the healing, the peace, and the promises of our Savior. His gospel has one purpose: to prepare and qualify us to return to our Father in Heaven. His glorious Atonement helps us stand when we feel weak-kneed and less confident when all around us spins in turmoil.

Jesus Christ has shown us the way and reached out to bring us close to Him, to stand by Him. May we love Him and serve Him and Heed his call, “Be of good cheer and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living god, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come.”<sup>47</sup>

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Hymn #136.

<sup>2</sup> Heidi S. Swinton, "I Know That My Redeemer Lives," *Updated Edition*, August 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Hymn #136.

<sup>4</sup> Russell M. Nelson, "Prophets, Leadership and Divine Law," Worldwide devotional for young adults, January 2017.

<sup>5</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants 25:10.

<sup>6</sup> See 1 Nephi 8:7.

<sup>7</sup> See 1 Nephi 8:10.

<sup>8</sup> See 1 Nephi 8:12.

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Nephi 8:15.

<sup>10</sup> See 1 Nephi 8:28.

<sup>11</sup> See 1 Nephi 8:33 (emphasis added).

<sup>12</sup> See Enos 1:27.

<sup>13</sup> See Isaiah 2:5, 2 Nephi 12:5.

<sup>14</sup> See Matthew 25:1-12.

<sup>15</sup> See Matthew 25:12.

<sup>16</sup> See JST, Matthew 25:11.

<sup>17</sup> See John 1:17.

<sup>18</sup> See Alma 5:19.

<sup>19</sup> See Moses 1:3.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Smith, "I Had Beheld a Vision," 1820.

<sup>21</sup> See 2 Nephi 12:5.

<sup>22</sup> The Joseph Smith Papers, "Discourse 21 February 1844, as Reported by Willford Woodruff," page 195.

<sup>23</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 122:9.

<sup>24</sup> Dean C. Jessee, "Personal Writings of Joseph Smith," 2002.

<sup>25</sup> See Helaman 13: 29.

<sup>26</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.

<sup>27</sup> See Proverbs 3:5.

<sup>28</sup> See Heidi S. Swinton, "To the Rescue: The Biography of Thomas S. Monson," Desert Book 2010, 135-136.

<sup>29</sup> Truman Madsen, ed., *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story*, SLC: Bookcraft, 1980, 390.

<sup>30</sup> Hymn #193.

<sup>31</sup> Luke 17:21.

<sup>32</sup> Hymn #193.

<sup>33</sup> Alma 7:12.

<sup>34</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants 88:6.

<sup>35</sup> See Philippians 4:7.

<sup>36</sup> See John 14:27.

<sup>37</sup> See Joshua 1:9.

<sup>38</sup> See John 14:27.

<sup>39</sup> See Doctrine and Covenants 1:38.

<sup>40</sup> Quentin L. Cook, "A Banquet of Consequences," BYU Devotional, February 7, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Ronald A. Rasband, "The Things of My Soul," October General Conference 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Dale E. Renlund, "Accessing God's Power through Covenants," April General Conference 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Jeffrey R. Holland, "Lord, I Believe," General Conference April 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Henry B. Eyring, "Finding Personal Peace," April 2023.

<sup>45</sup> Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "God will Do Something Unimaginable," October General Conference 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Nelson, "Christ is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains," April General Conference 2021.

<sup>47</sup> D&C 68:6.