

AN OLIVE LEAF

“... plucked from the Tree of Paradise, the Lord’s message of peace to us.”
(See History of the Church 1:316 and D&C 88.)

“THE LONELINESS OF LEADERSHIP”

By Gordon B. Hinckley

In his 2 April 1995 morning general conference address, new Church President Gordon B. Hinckley recalled his 4 November 1969 Brigham Young University devotional talk, “The Loneliness of Leadership” and that now he realizes the “full import of that loneliness.” Here are excerpts from that address.

I SUPPOSE MANY OF YOU WATCHED President Nixon last night as I did. . . . As I looked at him I thought of the terrible loneliness of leadership.

True he . . . has . . . any number of men with whom he can consult; but when all the chips are down, he has to face the world alone, as it were. His advisers do not face the cannon fire of public opinion. . . .

[W]hile watching him, there came to my mind some great words attributed to Queen Victoria: “Uneasy rests the head that wears the crown.”

. . . There is a great loneliness in leadership, but . . . we have to live with ourselves. A man has to live with his conscience. A Man has to live up to his inner feelings. . . .

There is a loneliness in all aspects of leadership. . . . [W]e feel it somewhat in this University. BYU is being discussed across the nation today because of some of our practices and some of our policies and some of our procedures, but I would like to offer the thought that no institution and no man ever lived at peace with itself or with himself in a spirit of compromise. . . .

It was ever thus. The price of leadership is loneliness. The price of adherence to conscience is loneliness. I think it is inescapable. The Savior of the world was a man who walked in loneliness. I do not know of any statement more underlined with the pathos of loneliness than his statement: “. . . The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” (Matt. 8:20.) . . .

Joseph Smith likewise was a figure of loneliness. I have a great love for the boy who came out of the woods, who after that experience could never be the same again, who was betrayed and persecuted and looked down upon. Can you sense the pathos in these words of the Prophet? “For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would of-



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fend God and come under condemnation.” (Joseph Smith—History 2:25.)

. . . This has been the history of the Church. . . . It came as a result of the position of leadership which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven. . . . And when the declaration was made concerning the only true and living Church upon the face of the earth, we were immediately put in a position of loneliness, the loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away and which we must face up to with boldness and courage and ability. . . .

I go back to the words of Paul: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” (2 Cor. 4:8–9.) . . .

You will feel the loneliness of your faith.

It is not easy, for instance, to be virtuous when all about you there are those who scoff at virtue.

It is not easy to be honest when all about you there are those who are interest in only making “a fast buck.” . . .

It is not easy to be industrious when all about you there are those who do not believe in the value of work.

It is not easy to be a man of integrity when all about you there are those who will forsake principle for expediency.

. . . [T]here is loneliness—but a man of your kind has to live with his conscience. A man has to live with his principles. A man has to live with his convictions. A man has to live with his testimony. Unless he does so, he is miserable—dreadfully miserable. And while there may be thorns, while there may be disappointment, while there may be trouble and travail, heartache and heartbreak, and desperate loneliness, there will be peace and comfort and strength.

I like these great words of the Lord . . . [:] “I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up.” (D&C 84:88.)

. . . God bless you to walk fearlessly even though you walk in loneliness, and to know in your hearts that peace which comes of squaring one’s life with principle, that “peace which passeth all understanding”