

Meekly Placing Our Total Trust in God

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My wife, Kay, and I are thrilled to be with you this morning. Thank you for coming.

You probably have not seen too many photos of General Authorities in their young adult years with facial hair that would disqualify them from enrolling at BYU. Well, I was not then a member of the Church. I was a university student working part-time at McDonald's, where I met a young woman who was sufficiently alert to see some potential in me and to encourage our relationship, for which I am most grateful. She would often arrange with the manager—unbeknownst to me—for us to be assigned the closing shift together. As she had no transport home, I would give her a lift, and we quickly fell in love. It was she who introduced me to the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

So I recommend McDonald's! And I recommend finding an eternal companion who will always love the Lord first.

How blessed we are to know our God and His plan for us and to love Him first in our lives.

Each of us knows that Jesus Christ lived, died, and was resurrected,¹ and we know that He is the Son of God.² We know that His gospel is restored—one proof of which is the wondrous Book of Mormon, a book of genius beyond the capacity of Joseph Smith, or of any man, to write and a book that shows the Savior's love for each of us. It truly is another testament of Jesus Christ because it helps us to come to know Him deeply and personally and to understand His ways.³

As I read the Book of Mormon for the first time, I could not deny its divinity. Its examples of the love, justice, and mercy of God; its teachings of His desire to bless His children; and the depth of insight it gives into both His nature and ours spoke to my heart.

Given these foundations for our faith, is there any reason for us not to have total confidence in God—who has proven Himself time and time again, as shown in the scriptures, in the history

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of His Church, and in our personal lives and experiences—when we allow Him?

So how is that confidence manifest as we face the challenges and hardships that will surely confront us on our journey through life?

Perhaps we can get some guidance from a story set in the mountain range of southeastern Australia.

We Are the Riders, and God Carries Us

The Man from Snowy River is best known as an iconic Australian movie released in 1982. It was based on a poem by the Australian bush poet Banjo Paterson, and it contains analogies to our journey through life when we allow our Savior to guide us.

The poem tells the story of a stockman (a cowboy in American culture) who came with his horse to help round up a prized and unique wild colt that had escaped from a ranch (or a station, as we call it in Australia). As is the Australian way—and because it can be a harsh country, as evidenced by the recent drought and bushfires and the current floods—when someone is in need, people come together to help out their mates. That happened in this instance. A number of drovers (stockmen who herd cattle or sheep) gathered together to round up this wild colt.

The most famous of the riders who had gathered was Clancy, and he came from a place in the bush called The Overflow. He was renowned as a champion rider and drover. His experience, courage, and riding abilities were famous throughout the country.

But one of the riders, the man from Snowy River, together with his horse, was the cause of some concern to the rest. They felt that the combination of this horse and rider would not be up to the task. They thought he couldn't do it. Naysayers and doubters are never in short supply—they are a dime a dozen.

Similarly, many people today lack confidence in God, or in the combination of us *with* God. But we know that God can make weak things become strong.⁴

Anyway, in this particular case, the rider and his horse were from the Snowy River region near

Mount Kosciuszko, Australia's highest mountain. The poem describes the scene of the group of riders and the escaped colt born from a mare called Regret:

*There was movement at the station, for the word had
passed around
That the colt from old Regret had got away,
And had joined the wild bush horses—he was worth a
thousand pound,
So all the cracks had gathered to the fray.
All the tried and noted riders from the stations near
and far
Had mustered at the homestead overnight,
For the bushmen love hard riding where the wild bush
horses are,
And the stock-horse snuffs the battle with delight.*

...

*And one was there, a stripling on a small and weedy
beast,
He was something like a racehorse undersized,
With a touch of Timor pony—three parts thoroughbred
at least—
And such as are by mountain horsemen prized.
He was hard and tough and wiry—just the sort that
won't say die—
There was courage in his quick impatient tread;
And he bore the badge of gameness in his bright and
fiery eye,
And the proud and lofty carriage of his head.*

*But still so slight and weedy, one would doubt his power
to stay,
And the old man said, "That horse will never do
For a long and tiring gallop—lad, you'd better stop
away,
Those hills are far too rough for such as you."
So he waited sad and wistful—only Clancy stood his
friend—
"I think we ought to let him come," he said;
"I warrant he'll be with us when he's wanted at the end,
For both his horse and he are mountain bred."*

*"He hails from Snowy River, up by Kosciusko's side,
Where the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough,*

*Where a horse's hoofs strike firelight from the flint
stones every stride,
The man that holds his own is good enough.
And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make
their home,
Where the river runs those giant hills between;
I have seen full many horsemen since I first commenced
to roam,
But nowhere yet such horsemen have I seen."*⁵

So the man from Snowy River was reluctantly allowed to ride with them. Now the most important part of this story is, to me, the relationship of trust and confidence that this one rider, who was doubted by the others, had in his horse. It is analogous to the relationship that we *should have* with God—a relationship in which we place our total trust and faith in Him, despite life's challenges.⁶

The riders eventually caught up with the wild horses and chased them until Clancy was able to head them off, standing in their way and cracking his whip to stop them. But the wild horses could see their beloved mountains and simply rushed past him and his stockwhip, racing for the safety of those mountains. The riders followed them to the first peak.

The terrain was now full of wombat holes, which are similar to rabbit holes but bigger. Wombats are short-legged, muscular marsupials about three feet long and weighing about sixty pounds, and they dig burrows in which to live—the openings of which make the ground perilous for riding. And there were lots of loose rocks and eucalyptus trees (or stringybarks), so there was no clear path down the mountain.

But herein lies the difference between the man from Snowy River and the others. He had absolute faith in his horse. Because they had worked together for a long time, the man knew his horse perfectly. And his horse was used to this type of terrain and had galloped down mountains like this before.

So it needs to be with us and God. We encounter hardships and challenges in life. We can sometimes feel like we are careening out of control down a mountainside beset with hidden obstacles. But God has been there and done this

before. So why not put our trust in Him—He who knows exactly how to handle it?⁷ Or do we think we know best and set aside His counsel as we try to go it alone?

As you will hear in the poem, the man from Snowy River did not seek to impose his will on his horse as they galloped down the mountain. Instead, he simply cheered at the looming adventure and let his horse "have his head."⁸ He didn't even pull the horse up to stop him from descending the mountain, as did all the others, including even Clancy, as we will hear. When galloping down the mountain, the man from Snowy River applied no pressure to the bridle to attempt to direct or to slow or to hurry the horse. He left that to his horse, who knew better than he did.

Do we let God have His head in our lives so that we can arrive safely at our destination? Or do we question His counsel or His commandments and lack full confidence and faith in His ability to lead us?

Let's return to the words of the poem:

*Then fast the horsemen followed, where the gorges deep
and black
Resounded to the thunder of their tread,
And the stockwhips woke the echoes, and they fiercely
answered back
From cliffs and crags that beetled overhead.
And upward, ever upward, the wild horses held their
way,
Where mountain ash and kurrajong grew wide;
And the old man muttered fiercely, "We may bid the mob
good day,
No man can hold them down the other side."*

*When they reached the mountain's summit, even Clancy
took a pull,
It well might make the boldest hold their breath,
The wild hop scrub grew thickly, and the hidden ground
was full
Of wombat holes, and any slip was death.
But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his
head,
And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer,
And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down
its bed,
While the others stood and watched in very fear.*

*He sent the flint stones flying, but the pony kept his feet,
He cleared the fallen timber in his stride,
And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat—
It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride.
Through the stringy barks and saplings, on the rough
and broken ground,
Down the hillside at a racing pace he went;
And he never drew the bridle till he landed safe and sound,
At the bottom of that terrible descent.*⁹

As you can see, the man from Snowy River was fair dinkum. As we would say in Australia: “His blood was worth bottling.”

Well, he finally got in front of the wild horses, who were so tired and beaten that he single-handedly turned them back toward the other riders and herded them home—not just the escaped, prized colt but *all* the wild horses in the pack. The blessings outweighed his expectations—again similar to what happens when we put our absolute trust in God and submit our will to His, and when we don’t shift in our seat.¹⁰

So I liken this story to that of your life and of mine. We are the riders, and God carries us. If we are one with Him, He will carry us to our goal.

Our First Responsibility Is to God

There have been instances in my life when I have felt like I was rushing down a mountainside but was being sustained and led by the Lord. I was called as bishop of a large ward after I had been a member of the Church for less than three years, and I really knew nothing. I was twenty-six years old, and we had been married for only three years. Our first daughter was only one year old. I was confronted with challenges that I was unable to overcome, with ward members having marriage problems and other issues. I was a novice at marriage, and all I could do was let the Spirit carry me through the counseling that He gave on my behalf.

I remember hearing the confession of a young lady in the ward and not having the slightest idea how I should counsel her. Yet words flowed from me,¹¹ and I remember feeling an almost

out-of-body experience, as it seemed I was an observer to this interview, watching from behind where I sat as the Savior lifted this young lady’s burdens. I was in awe of the Savior’s love and ability to heal. There have been many times when all the Lord required of me was to not shift in my seat as He led me down the precipitous slope to land safely at the bottom.

In order to be one with Him, we need to understand His most important teachings and commandments. So let’s reflect on what they are.

The Savior was asked, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”¹²

And this was His answer:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

*This is the first and great commandment.*¹³

It was only after this that He added, “And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”¹⁴

It is important to note the order and emphasis given by the Savior, as it is critical. We cannot supplant the first commandment—the great commandment—with the second, as is often the rationale for the solely humanistic view promoted in the secular world. And we *cannot disregard* the first commandment while purporting to live the second. We must live both, but we must never allow our love for others to work against our love for God and our desire to keep His commandments.

The failure to follow this correct priority is a mistake that is being made far too often today. Some interpret a desire to love others with a need to embrace their life choices, even when those choices are not in harmony with God’s commandments. While we live the commandments and help others to understand that we do so because we love God and honor His advice, we can, and should, still love those who do not agree with us.

But we must be clear about this. There are many today who believe that to love someone means that we cannot disagree with their life choices. This belief is false!

To love someone does not mean that we are obliged to embrace as our own everything that

they embrace. The Savior loved the woman taken in adultery¹⁵ and the thief on the cross.¹⁶ His love was not diminished by His disagreeing with their choices. His approach was to correct but not harp on those choices. He simply stated the truth in relation to the moral issue and lovingly encouraged compliance. And so it is with us. Our first responsibility is to God and to His teachings of absolute truth and to His commandments.

The reality is that those who hold the great commandment and the second commandment to the order that God gave them will need to stand up and be counted. They will need to stand up for what is really true in an ever more secular world. Each one of us will need to cultivate the qualities of integrity, faith, humility, and strength—just like the man from Snowy River. The combination of these qualities provides a possible definition of the word *meekness*.

The man from Snowy River was meek. He was submissive when at first he was denied the chance to ride with the others as they sought the colt. Even when riding he did not initially lead out or seek glory. He simply and humbly applied, with integrity and faith, the strength that had come to him because of his unfailing and proven trust in his mountain horse.

This quality of meekness is not well understood and, consequently, not embraced. It almost seems to be counterintuitive because it brings together the apparently conflicting qualities of humility, integrity, and strength.

Its meaning is well encapsulated in the Ghanaian Adinkra symbol of the ram's horns. During the five years my wife, Kay, and I lived and served in Ghana, we grew to admire and love the many Adinkra symbols. They teach wisdom and the connection we have to God. But the ram's horn symbol was especially dear to us. Kay has a ring, earrings, and a pendant, and I have a tiepin and cuff links fashioned into these ram's horn symbols. Kay even made me a tie from material with the same symbol. We are both wearing these items today.

The ram will fight fiercely against an adversary, but his strength is derived by his bowing his head in a sign of humility. In that submissive stance

he assumes his greatest strength. As his head is lowered, he gains power to battle with, and defeat, opponents. Have you felt increased power and strength after bowing your head in heartfelt prayer and expressing your submission to your Heavenly Father?

And so it is with this quality of meekness. When we combine sincere humility and faith with the integrity and strength gained through embracing and living absolute truth and intimately knowing God, we become meek. And those who are meek are anything but weak.¹⁷

So our objective should be to be humble and submissive to the Lord and to increase in strength and power as a result.¹⁸ We do this by growing closer to Him and multiplying the experiences we have with Him. This requires our acting with commitment and not being acted upon.

Heroes: Staying as One with God

We live in a world growing further and further from God and His truths; you will need to determine the strength and focus that you are prepared to devote to loving God and standing for truth.

Will you shift in your seat and succumb to popular opinion, or will you stand firm and confident in the counsels and blessings of your loving God and let Him have His head?

In this regard, we can take counsel from the wise words Helaman spoke to his sons Nephi and Lehi:

*And now, my sons, 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 his 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.*¹⁹

Unfortunately this is not the popular or most circulated message on social media today. Instead it seems that sporting icons, famous musicians, and some actors and actresses whose lives are

often full of deceit and dishonor sometimes become our heroes.

But they are not my heroes. My heroes are the mentors in my life—those people who have shown faith and meekness in helping and loving me. The greatest of those heroes is my wife, Kay.

President Russell M. Nelson embodies all of these qualities. He is a man who always has time for others. He is meek and kind. Recently I was invited to join with the First Presidency and one of the apostles, along with one or two others, to meet with the ambassador from Rwanda. Mistakenly, the meeting appeared on my calendar for Friday, but when I arrived, I found that it should have been Thursday. I had not read the invitation correctly and missed the meeting. I felt absolutely sick in the stomach for disappointing our prophet, and I wondered how I could possibly face him. My feeble attempt to apologize was met with absolute kindness. He responded to my apology by indicating that I shouldn't worry about missing the meeting. He said he completely understood how such a mistake could happen.

My grandfather, who died more than forty years ago, is also my hero. He taught and helped us when we were struggling with criticism and ostracism from others because we had accepted the gospel. My grandfather was a highly regarded businessman who was meek and kind. Despite his position in society, he always sidestepped praise given him. He lived a simple and humble life, despite his status and his many and obvious talents and qualities. And he taught me by example about love and devotion in marriage.

Another hero was my first stake president, John Parker. We moved into his ward when we were newly married and very poor. I remember one morning when we were about to paint our small and very modest home. President Parker and his wife came to the front door very early with paintbrushes in hand to spend the day helping us in this task. He also was totally humble and meek, yet a man of tremendous moral strength.

We need to determine whether we will work with God and others for their benefit or whether we will forget God and seek to show the world how talented we are. When injuries brought an

early end to my rugby playing days, I took up rowing with a mate of mine. The first day we went to the rowing club, we took out a boat called a pair—a boat with a seat and one oar for each of the two oarsmen, with the oars being on opposing sides of the boat. Our instinct was to try to outrow each other, showing our superior strength. As a result, we zigzagged up the river, with one of us outdoing the other for a time and then the reverse happening as we tired. Those watching us must have been bent over laughing because we were working against each other rather than for each other. Fortunately we learned from that experience and had success in races in the months and years that followed.

But that lesson applies to each of our lives and to our need to be aligned and in harmony with our Savior.

We each need to experience a watershed moment when we choose the way that we will live our lives. Hopefully yours has already happened. My watershed moment occurred as I prepared for and entered the temple at age twenty-four—just one year after my baptism—to receive the temple ordinances and to be sealed to Kay. The ordinances were God's way of delivering the covenants I would make with Him.

I made covenants in the temple—promises to God. I understood the import of those covenants and I understood that I was promising God that I would always do certain things. This was most serious to me, as it would bind me for the whole of my life. It wouldn't matter how I felt after that time about any apparent frailties of other members or even things I didn't fully understand about the Church itself. I was not promising the Church or the leaders of the Church; I was promising God! And the promises I made would be inviolate.

I hope that all here feel the same about the promises—the covenants—you have made to God. We can trust Him absolutely. We can get to know Him even better as He works with us in the many and varied experiences of our lives, just as the man from Snowy River knew his horse through experience upon experience. I have come to know God through my many experiences with the Holy Ghost over the years. It has reached the stage

where I now *expect* that the Holy Ghost will guide and sustain me in each assignment I receive, without exception, because He has *always* done so.

So my question to each person here is simply, Will you stay as one with God—as the man from Snowy River did with his horse—by placing your full trust and faith in Him, or will you instead hold back by lacking the courage, the commitment, and the meekness to reap the rewards of faithful lives? Our quest is eternal life, and it is won by His grace, but only when combined with our faith in God and our efforts.

So let's not waste the precious time we have on earth in pursuits that are not important for our eternal destinies—as do so many young adults who spend their time and focus on social media, virtual reality, or electronic games.

I feel to repeat something I said a few months ago because it is written in my heart:

*There is no treasure, nor any hobby, nor any status, nor any social media, nor any video games, nor any sport, nor any association with a celebrity, nor anything on earth that is more precious than eternal life.*²⁰

So the question for each of us is, Are we true followers of Him who gave His all for us; He who is our Redeemer and our Advocate with the Father; He who was, Himself, absolutely committed in His atoning sacrifice²¹ and is so now in His love, His mercy, and His desire for us to have eternal joy?

Please, please do not put your total commitment off until you get around to it at some non-existent, future time. Get fair dinkum now. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See John 20:14–17; 21:14.
2. See Matthew 16:16.
3. See 2 Nephi 4:19.
4. See Ether 12:27.
5. A. B. “Banjo” Paterson, *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009), 5–6.
6. See Matthew 11:28–30.
7. See Alma 7:11–12.
8. Paterson, *The Man from Snowy River*, 7.
9. Paterson, *The Man from Snowy River*, 7.
10. See Helaman 10:4–5.
11. See D&C 84:85.
12. Matthew 22:36.
13. Matthew 22:37–38.
14. Matthew 22:39.
15. See John 8:3–11.
16. See Luke 23:32–43; see also Matthew 27:38 and Mark 15:27.
17. See Numbers 12:3; Matthew 5:5; 3 Nephi 12:5.
18. See Helaman 10:4–10.
19. Helaman 5:12.
20. Terence M. Vinson, “True Disciples of the Savior,” *Ensign*, November 2019.
21. See Luke 22:42; 3 Nephi 11:10–11.