

Appreciation—Sign of Maturity

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President Oaks, students, faculty members, leaders of this great administration, and special guests, I appreciate very much the opportunity of being with you today and having this association. I would like to emphasize the word *appreciate* because I hope to draw your attention to that vital subject as we go forward.

As I look at these missionaries visiting with us today from the Language Training Mission and at the thousands of returned missionaries in this devotional, together with others who are prospective missionaries, I am reminded of an experience I had the other evening that Sister Ashton instigated. She was tending our four-year-old grandson, and it came time for him to retire. Sister Ashton escorted him into my study and said, "Michael, would you like your grandfather to help you with your prayers before you go to bed?"

I think he said, "Yeah." So he came over and knelt at my knees. All of a sudden I realized that this was an experience I had not had for a long time. As he knelt I said, "Would you like to say your prayers by yourself or have me help you?"

He said, "You help me."

We proceeded, and I said, "Heavenly Father."

"Heavenly Father."

"Bless Mommy."

"Bless Mommy."

"Bless Daddy."

"Bless Daddy."

"Help me to be a good boy."

"Help me to be a good boy."

"Help me to grow up to be a missionary."

No answer.

"Help me to grow up to be a missionary."

No answer.

"Help me to grow up to be a missionary."

He raised his head, opened his eyes, looked at me, and said, "Okay, I will." He had wanted to think that one over, as I hope all of us will before we accept.

Feeling Gratitude and Appreciation

Appreciation for people and events that come into our lives is most important because it is God's way of helping us to grow. May I say to all of you missionaries, returned missionaries, students, and others within the

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sound of my voice, that the ultimate in maturity is being able to feel and express appreciation, being fully aware of value and importance, and showing gratitude for it. During the past six months I have had the opportunity of visiting approximately 10 percent of all of the full-time missionaries we have out in the world—missionaries in Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti, England, Holland, northern California, and Hawaii. I think we have associated with approximately twenty-four hundred.

While conducting personal interviews and participating in testimony meetings and visiting with missionaries and taking part in proselyting and leadership responsibility discussions, I have learned much.

I would like to say with full emphasis and conviction that the most mature missionaries I have met presently serving or having returned are those who have learned to keep the commandments and who also have become able to feel and express appreciation.

How does God feel about appreciation? From the Doctrine and Covenants I share this: "And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments" (D&C 59:21)

This morning, as indicated, I would like to speak to the first part of that scripture. Would you like to have God's wrath raised against you? Would you like to have God mad at you? It can come and it will happen if we fail to show appreciation and gratitude. Why does the lack of appreciation offend God and kindle his wrath? Not because he needs to see and hear our appreciation and gratitude, but because he knows an absence of appreciation on the part of anyone causes personal stagnation. Our growth and our progress are delayed when we fail to feel and express appreciation. May we think for a few moments about occasions and situations where we actually say, "Thank thee, God, for people and events that

have come into our lives that have made it possible for us to develop and grow and mature, for all people, for all conditions, and for all circumstances when we are allowed to appreciate human beings and situations for what they can do and will mean to us."

Showing Tolerance

Let me share a recent experience. As I have indicated, we have done a lot of traveling the last six months. As we travel we take a lot of airplane rides under all conditions, where we have an opportunity of mingling and meeting with people and sharing events that are new. Horizons open up for us to grow and develop if we will use them properly. I am thankful for this experience that I will share with you this morning. It gave me an opportunity to practice and to learn tolerance and appreciation.

Returning from an assignment in the Los Angeles area recently, I boarded a plane and took the only remaining seat on the aisle, front row, in the nonsmoking section. I sat down, fastened my belt, and the plane was soon taxiing out for takeoff. After we had reached a certain altitude, the sign went off and we were allowed to unfasten seat belts. The general overhead no-smoking sign was removed. Still being seated in the no-smoking section, I noticed when the signal went off that the woman seated next to me opened her purse, took out a cigarette, lit it, and was in the process of smoking. I looked up at her and looked at the sign overhead which said, "No-smoking Section." Immediately the thought came to me, "Perhaps I could bump her in the ribs and say, 'Can't you read? Can't you see where you are?'" Then, on second thought, it came to me that perhaps she thought I needed a little bit of it too, so I allowed her to finish that one and hoped that would be the end. But as soon as that was out, she lit another one. While I was trying to read and appear to be not too disturbed, I was boiling just a little bit because my rights and

privileges were being abused by someone next to me. It went on and on until we arrived in Salt Lake City. I think because I was so annoyed I kept track of how often she smoked. She had eight cigarettes between Los Angeles and Salt Lake. We had no conversation of any significance except, "Isn't it nice on the plane?" Once in a while it was a little bumpy, and we exchanged that thought. I hadn't used the opportunity to be much of a missionary; I spent my time being annoyed and thinking how much right I had to tell her to stop smoking. Finally, as we were making an approach to land in Salt Lake, she leaned over to me and said, "I hope we have a soft landing."

And so I said, "Any particular reason why you would like us to have a soft landing?"

She said, "Yes, under the seat I have some china items that I am bringing to Salt Lake City for my daughter's trousseau." She said, "My daughter is being married tomorrow." (This was on a Sunday.)

I said, "Where is your daughter being married?"

She said, "In the Mormon Tabernacle."

I said, "Oh, are you going to the Mormon Tabernacle to see your daughter married?"

She said, "No, I can't go to the Mormon Tabernacle because I am not a member of the Mormon Church."

I said, "Oh, how long has your daughter been a member of the Church?"

She said, "About two years. She was attending the University of Utah and became acquainted with the Church and was baptized about two years ago."

I said, "Who is your daughter marrying?"
"A returned Mormon minister."

(For you missionaries listening in, this is not what they tell you on page 17 about how to give the lessons or how to approach people, but this was my way of doing it on this occasion.)

About this time we had landed, the plane had come to a stop, the gates had been opened,

and the runway was prepared for our departure. As we made our way down, being the first ones on the front row, I followed her down the steps. We opened the door and went into the departure gate. Two good-looking young people, a handsome young man and a beautiful young woman, ran up. The girl greeted her mother with open arms and hugged her. Then she looked past her mother, saw me, and said, "Oh, Mother, I would like you to meet Elder Ashton, one of the apostles of our Church." About then the thought crossed my mind, "Why, I had the right to bump her in the ribs and say, 'Can't you see? Can't you read? Can't you understand you're violating my rights?'" I would like to just indicate this morning that I appreciate the fact that for once I was tolerant and able to learn and understand from a person who sat next to me—someone whom I could possibly have abused verbally because I had the right to.

As we walked out of the terminal together, just the four of us—the mother, the daughter, the prospective son-in-law, and I—I said to this young couple, "Congratulations on being married in the Mormon Tabernacle." The girl smiled, "Who told you that?"

I said, "Your mom."

She said, "Mom, you misunderstood. I'm being married in the temple."

Her mother said, "What's the difference?" For the next three or four minutes I heard a daughter tell her mother the difference between a tabernacle marriage and a temple marriage. How proud I was of her, the way she was able to explain to her mother where she was being married, not on the tabernacle grounds, but in the temple for time and all eternity. I walked out very pleased for that experience of having an opportunity to learn and possibly teach tolerance and to appreciate people more fully.

Appreciation in the Mission Field

As we visit with the missionaries, we ask them to stand up and tell us where they are from, bear their testimonies, and tell us about their companions and their parents. This is a great experience in learning about them and about what their thought processes are and what their senses of values are.

May I share for our edification this morning some of the comments to which I have paid particular note as they relate to what I would like to impress you with this morning. I recall a missionary standing up and saying, "I have been in the mission field nine months, and I have had five companions." With a quivering chin and a choked-up voice, he said, "Never once in nine months have I had a companion who told me he loved me or appreciated what I was doing for him. I hope and pray that someday, somehow, I'll have a companion who will tell me that he loves me and appreciates me."

No matter where we come from, my fellow students, no matter what family conditions are, we should learn and be appreciative of those circumstances which can build and lift us.

I recall one missionary who stood up and said, with a great deal of pride, "I'm Elder So-and-so from Bloomington, Idaho, population one hundred." He said it with so much sincerity and pride that some of the more boastful ones from Texas quieted down and didn't say so much after that.

I'm thinking of another missionary, who said, "Two weeks before I was going to see my bishop and tell him I was ready to go in the mission field, I had some doubts. I had some questions about the future and even about the Church. I walked into the living room and interrupted my father, who was watching TV, and said, 'Dad, I'm not so sure about Joseph Smith. I'm not so sure I know this Church is true. I'm not so sure I want to go out and represent it. I have a lot of questions and I

have a lot of misgivings.' When I said that to my father, he walked over and turned the television off, took the cigarette he had in his hand and smashed it in the ashtray, took the can of beer he had in his other hand and put it down on the table, and said, 'Son, I want you to know that I don't do very much about it, but I know that the church of Jesus Christ is true and that Joseph Smith is a prophet. I want you to hear me say it, because I know that better than anything in the world.'" This young man stood up and said, "I want my father to know, even though he probably can't hear me, that I appreciate him. He has some habits that he's not proud of. He has some habits that I'm not proud of. But he's my father and has a testimony and I love him." That kind of appreciation, that kind of maturity, will not only help a missionary to grow and develop to become more purposeful in life, but will also be a great anchor in life's paths.

The most common question I have asked me as I visit with missionaries (this can apply to students as well), the most frequent question that comes up in the mission field when meeting with the missionaries is, "Elder Ashton, what can I do to get my mother or father or brother or sister more active in the Church? What can I do? I realize now what they are missing and what they need. What can I do to get them active in the Church? What can I do to get them to become members of the Church?" In every case and every situation I have taken the opportunity to say, "The best way to get your family members active in the Church or to become members is to let them know that you appreciate them for what they do and what they stand for and tell them how much you love them."

You need to express appreciation on a continuing basis, to love family members and neighbors into the Church. You will never get your parents to come into the Church by threatening, embarrassing, or demanding. They will come to the Church only through

your expressing appreciation for what they have done, who they are, and your great respect and admiration for them. I hope that we can realize and remember the importance of appreciation.

May I say that our Savior has indicated in all that he has done the importance of gratitude and thanks and appreciation. May I just share a few short quotations with you.

He took the cup and gave thanks.

He took the seven loaves and gave thanks.

Give thanks always for all things, he taught.

Thou shalt thank the Lord thy God in all things.

And ye must give thanks unto God

In the spirit for whatsoever blessings ye are blessed with.

From the Doctrine and Covenants: “Verily I say unto you my friends, fear not, let your hearts be comforted; yea, rejoice evermore, and in everything give thanks” (D&C 98:1).

Appreciation within the Family

What a great day it will be in our lives when we can appreciate the blessing of appreciation and what it means to us. I would like to indicate to you today that appreciation of companion, appreciation of sweetheart, appreciation of husband and wife is so important. Appreciation is a most important ingredient in a happy marriage.

To those of you who are courting, those who have plans, I would say to you today without any reservation that if you are keeping company with someone who fails to feel and express appreciation you should avoid forming partnership with him or her. It takes real appreciation to make a happy marriage. I can see some of you who are sitting rather close to each other, squeezing each other’s hands and saying, “I appreciate you, don’t I?” Then you would go on to something else. But it is just a little deeper, much more significant than that.

Many a family and marriage are broken because of a lack of appreciation. The most mature students, the most mature and successful people who participate in marriage, are those who understand appreciation. Any wonder that God has said we have two main things to do if we would avoid his wrath—to keep the commandments and to confess his hand in all things? What a strength it is to have a companion who appreciates, feels, and expresses appreciation. I can’t overemphasize the fact today that one of the greatest virtues any person can have individually and on an eternal basis is the virtue of appreciation. How many times have you heard people say, “My marriage was terminated primarily because my husband didn’t appreciate anything I ever did for him. No matter what I did, there was no appreciation!” Or the same is said about a wife who never knew what it was to show appreciation.

Appreciation for Gifts from Our Heavenly Father

I am happy to indicate to you as members of this great student body that appreciation for what’s done for us is a great virtue—one that we need to understand and practice if we would get the most out of life. I am grateful today for the love and the gifts of our Heavenly Father. When we stop to ponder what he has given us, what he has shared, the more I think of it, the more I realize how unable I am to comprehend his great gifts.

God’s love for us was so great that it was possible for him to endure and look upon the sufferings of his Only Begotten Son. We should be eternally grateful that God gave to us his Son, our Savior and Redeemer. Without his love, his sacrifice, and without him we could never be glorified in his eternal presence. The greatest gift of all and the one for which you and I should be most appreciative is the gift of his Son to us, for purposes and realizations

that we little comprehend today but should better understand with each passing hour.

How do we show appreciation for God's great gifts? How do we show appreciation for the gifts of parents, companions, roommates, those that we are with constantly? How do we do it? By our lives, by our works, and by our words, and through a willingness to confess his hand in this and in all other great gifts.

We are told that God is a jealous God—jealous lest we should ignore and fail to show appreciation for his greatest gift of all. Certainly we should all tremble to know that for us Jesus Christ was crucified and suffered. Perhaps one who suffered even more than he did, one who from his heavenly portals witnessed the abuse and the pain that was brought to the Son and restrained himself and allowed it to happen and take place so that we might live with him, is our Eternal Heavenly Father.

May I conclude by saying, "When thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God" (Alma 37:37). This is a choice, all-inclusive quotation from Alma.

From Psalms we read, "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever" (Psalms 106:1).

Brothers and sisters, I am pleased today to share these few thoughts with you in regard to this great virtue, this great attribute. I would say, not only to missionaries, but also to others who are here today, "You will be successful in your efforts in proportion to how quickly you can learn above and beyond the lessons and the discussions a full and complete appreciation for what you have and for those who labor with you and those who love you."

To all of us—students, faculty, administration—I say that those who have the opportunity of looking down from the celestial pew perhaps would say to us today, "Please, please learn and practice appreciation—in some quarters a forgotten virtue and something that kindles the wrath of God when you fail to practice it and live it." I humbly leave these thoughts with you, along with my love. Again I express my appreciation for what you teach and what you share and what we learn from each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.