

The Best Gifts

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Last February Sister Marjorie Hinckley, wife of our prophet, was chosen by the BYU student leaders to receive the Exemplary Womanhood Award. The award is a special recognition given to a woman whose life exemplifies the teachings of Jesus Christ. Upon receiving the award, Sister Hinckley responded to the honor by saying: “Those who have been active in the Church all their lives have been made by the Church. The Church has made me what I am.” Sister Hinckley’s life reflects all that the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches. She has always been a believer in the truthfulness of the gospel. She has lived what she believes and she is what she believes.

As I thought about Sister Hinckley’s comments, it brought to mind the words of another great woman who lived what she believed—the French peasant girl Joan of Arc:

Every woman gives her life for what she believes. Sometimes people believe in little or nothing, nevertheless they give up their lives to that little or nothing. One life is all we have, and we live it as we believe in living it, and then it’s gone. But to surrender what you are, and live without belief—that’s more terrible than dying—more terrible than dying young. [Maxwell Anderson, Joan of Lorraine, act 2]

I would like to share with you some of my beliefs and feelings about the things that make a difference in my life—that which defines me. First, I know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. It is of the utmost importance to me. The gospel gives us an understanding of who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. The gospel teaches us about our relationship with God. We are his spirit children, and our destiny is to return to our heavenly home if we are true and faithful to his principles and ordinances. I know that the principles and ordinances of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the strait and narrow path back to our eternal home. Jesus Christ is the firstborn of the Father and is his Only Begotten Son. He is our Elder Brother. I believe Christ has extended his grace and love to all of our Father’s children through his atoning sacrifice. Our faithfulness will determine the reach of those blessings. He loves all people on the earth, and he expects us to develop the ability to love as he loved. He is our example. I know that Heavenly Father has blessed us—all of

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us—with every good gift to enable us to find our way back to him.

I wish to list a few of the great gifts offered to us with the hope that we will all ponder how we accept these gifts in our lives. A gift that is not accepted or appreciated becomes diminished. The first gift is the gift of life. President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

There is no greater blessing that can come than the blessing of birth. One third of the hosts of heaven, because of rebellion, were denied that privilege, and hence they have no bodies of flesh and bones, that great gift of God. [Joseph Fielding Smith, Doctrines of Salvation (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:116]

What a blessing it is to live—to be alive at this time. It is a blessing to live where we live and to be who we are. Do you ever think about this and ask, “Why me? Why am I so blessed?” We are fortunate to know the purpose of our mortal lives. We are blessed to have the challenges that come to us. These trials cause us to grow. As we experience those stretching times, we are preparing to partake of the gift that the Savior so obediently and lovingly gave us—the gift of everlasting life—even eternal life if we endure to the end. We must not waste the days of our probationary time in mortality (see 2 Nephi 9:27).

In conjunction with the gift of life is the blessing of parenthood—the opportunity to give life. I am thankful for my parents, for the life they gave me. I am thankful for their love and nurturing throughout my life—teaching me how to live. My 80-year-old mother continues to be a wonderful role model for me. I see so many good things in her. She continues to teach me.

I am grateful for the sacred responsibility of being a parent. As the years have gone by, my role and responsibilities connected with parenthood have changed. But I am constantly renewed and challenged as a mother and as a grandmother. Bored—never! I love our family.

I have learned so much throughout the years by being a mother. My children (that includes the grandchildren) continue to teach me.

I believe in marriage if at all possible. We should all seek for a marriage in the house of the Lord. That is where eternal blessings are found. I am so thankful for my eternal companion. I appreciate that which we share as parents, but even more important are those sacred thoughts and feelings we share together as husband and wife.

Again, it is a wonderful gift to know that we are children of God with a divine purpose. While in Hong Kong a number of years ago, my mother and I went on a tour of that beautiful city and surrounding area. The young woman tour guide became interested in us and asked about our homeland. We told her we were from the state of Utah. We also volunteered that we were Latter-day Saints and asked her if she had seen any Mormon missionaries there. She replied that she had heard of them, but she had no interest in religion or even in a Supreme Being. She then said: “I believe in only one thing, and that is myself—that is how the young generation feel in this city.” She went on to say: “We call it egoism. We believe in doing and accumulating all you can for yourself—no one else matters.”

Many people live their lives this way. It appears that all they care about is themselves. But I had never heard anyone admit to such a philosophy. I was surprised and realized that she was searching for a way to make her life meaningful. I thought of the scripture in Matthew 16:25–26:

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

The young lady did not understand who she is. She was not able to enjoy the gift of knowing

that she is a daughter of a Heavenly Father and that her life has purpose beyond herself.

We are a blessed people. There are so many gifts that we share in our associations. We enjoy the gifts of love, of friendships—a warm handshake, an arm around the shoulder, a smile, a sincere greeting. We enjoy the gifts of a listening ear, of testimonies shared, and of service rendered in so many ways.

Do we accept that which has been extended to us with gratitude? Do we see these blessings

as gifts from God—as well as gifts from those around us? Most important of all, are we good gift givers? I once heard Elder Neal A. Maxwell give this quote from G. K. Chesterton: “How much larger [our lives] would be if [we] could become smaller in it” (Gilbert K. Chesterton, “The Maniac,” *Orthodoxy* [New York: John Lane Company, 1909], pp. 34–35). God bless all of us to look outside ourselves and share our great gifts with others, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.