

*Love—
A Manifestation from God*

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Thank you for the beautiful prayer and the lovely music. I want to start today by expressing my appreciation to all who have made my experience at Brigham Young University such a sweet experience, starting with my time here as a student and including many years as a full-time faculty member. I know many of you have a deep appreciation for this institution and what it stands for and for the potential it has to influence the world for good. There are others who have not developed that appreciation, and it may take even years after you leave to realize what a blessing it was to be part of what we experience here. This institution is an example of God's love for us.

After President and Sister Bateman's devotional a few weeks ago, I had a concern. Sister Bateman and I are both vertically challenged. We are about the same height, and President Bateman, who is over six feet tall, is conducting today. I was concerned I would have a problem with the height of the podium and teleprompter. I was assured the problem would be taken care of. Thank you, President Bateman, for conducting today's devotional on your knees.

I hope you will allow me to thank individuals for the love and support they have given to me to this point in my life. Thank you to my mother, who is seated here in the front row. I

know she will love me no matter what happens today. Thank you to my father, who, after a battle with a number of health problems, was called home by a loving Father in Heaven. I miss him. Thank you to my sister, brother, nieces, and nephews, who love me no matter how many times I have failed. And thank you to friends and other family members who have shown they care about me and who I am.

I have asked myself over and over what I can say that will motivate you to listen or comfort you or add to your testimony. I ask for your faith and prayers and pray the Lord will bless me so I can say something that will be of value to you.

President Howard W. Hunter said:

*The world in which we live would benefit greatly if men and women everywhere would exercise the pure love of Christ, which is kind, meek, and lowly. . . . It is selfless because it seeks nothing in return. . . . It encourages diverse people to live together in Christian love regardless of religious belief, race, nationality, financial standing, education, or culture. [Howard W. Hunter, "A More Excellent Way," *Ensign*, May 1992, 61–62]*

Earlene Durrant was chair of the BYU Department of Physical Education when this devotional address was given on 8 February 2000.

An act of Christlike love and sacrifice occurred in Fayette, North Carolina, where Jane Smith was a junior high school teacher. In Jane Smith's school there was a rule against students wearing baggy pants. One day Jane was on hall duty when she noticed a student, whom she had never known before, wearing baggy pants. She approached him about the dress code violation. He looked at the teacher and said he wore the baggy pants to provide comfort for daily dialysis. Jane looked into the eyes of that young man and without hesitating offered him one of her kidneys. A month later, on December 16, 1999, the surgery was successfully performed, and Jane Smith donated one of her kidneys to this young male student. What an example of loving as Christ would!

Love is a manifestation from God, and, as Mary Ellen Edmunds stated, "It is the most gentle yet powerful force in the world" (*Love Is a Verb* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1995], ix). President Howard W. Hunter told us that "we need a more peaceful world" ("Excellent Way," 63). The Prophet Joseph Smith said: "If we would secure and cultivate the love of others, we must love others, even our enemies as well as friends" (HC 5:498).

In John 15:13 we read, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." And John also taught us:

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us. [1 John 4:9–10]

Jesus Christ laid down His life for us because He loves us. With this example of love, He became our advocate. An advocate is someone who believes in us, supports our efforts, and knows our strengths and weaknesses. An advocate will help us turn weaknesses into strengths. Elder C. Max Caldwell of the Seventy said:

By permitting his Son to make such a selfless and suffering sacrifice, the Father provided us with an ultimate expression of his love as his gift to the rest of his children. ["Love of Christ," Ensign, November 1992, 29]

Elder Caldwell went on to say that sacrifice is an example of how much we love God.

God also manifested His love for us when He sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. This was necessary for the exaltation of Adam and his posterity, and death is a prerequisite for resurrection. Without this example of love there would not have been the Atonement, no temporal and spiritual death. Salvation would not have been possible without the Fall and the Atonement. Truly the Fall of Adam is one of the greatest blessings and acts of love from God to mankind.

The Father and His Son have set the example of how we as family members should love one another. We need to be willing to sacrifice for one another. God sending His Son to atone for our sins is a manifestation of His love for us.

I would like each of you to think about your family for a minute and visualize in your mind the picture of your family you have in your apartment, home, or office where you work. You belong to that family unit, and the parents of that unit show their love for you. How do you show love for your parents?

If everyone in this beautiful building were seated in the chair-seat section and a picture was taken, it would be a picture of a large earthly family. The photographer taking this family unit picture would be our Father in Heaven. In 1 Nephi 17:36 we read, "Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited; and he hath created his children that they should possess it."

Living in our expanded earthly family units at BYU and our individual family units at home is not always easy. Many of you were able to select who would make up all or part of your family unit while you are a student. Many did

not know the members of their new family unit before becoming a part of it. These units have now expanded to a ward family and a family home evening group. Every day you are faced with problems that develop contention within your new families at BYU. Many of these situations are difficult, and sometimes it can seem difficult if not nearly impossible to make the situation right again. But these experiences provide opportunities to develop patience, understanding, tolerance, trust, and love. As we develop these qualities in a small family unit, we will be able to apply them in relationships we will have throughout our lives in our expanded earthly family units. We need to remember that we are each a spirit son or daughter of our Heavenly Father, who loves us and desires to bless us. As family members we should develop an attitude of loving and lifting each other up. President Howard W. Hunter said:

We need to be kinder with one another, more gentle and forgiving. We need to be slower to anger and more prompt to help. We need to extend the hand of friendship and resist the hand of retribution. In short, we need to love one another with the pure love of Christ, with genuine charity and compassion and, if necessary, shared suffering, for that is the way God loves us. ["Excellent Way," 61]

Love is obedience. Adam and Eve demonstrated their love for God by obeying Him. Obedience is one way for us to show our love for Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and others. President James E. Faust said that obedience to God's commandments is "an expression of our love for God. Blessed are those who need no reasons other than their love for the Savior to keep his commandments" (in James P. Bell, *In the Strength of the Lord: The Life and Teachings of James E. Faust* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1999], 410).

My point is illustrated in a story by an unknown author that has appeared under many titles:

Years ago there was a very wealthy man who shared a passion for art collecting with his devoted young son. Together they traveled around the world, adding only the finest art treasures to their collection. Priceless works by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet, and many others adorned the walls of the family estate. The widowed elderly man looked on with satisfaction as his only child became an experienced art collector. The son's trained eye and sharp business mind caused his father to beam with pride as they dealt with art collectors around the world.

As winter approached, war engulfed the nation, and the young man left to serve his country. After only a few short weeks, his father received a telegram. His beloved son was missing in action. The art collector anxiously awaited more news, fearing he would never see his son again. Within days his fears were confirmed. The young man had died while rushing a fellow soldier to a medic.

Distraught and lonely, the old man viewed the upcoming Christmas holidays with anguish and sadness. The joy of the season that he and his son had so looked forward to would visit his house no longer.

On Christmas morning a knock on the door awakened the depressed old man. As he walked to the door, the masterpieces of art on the walls only reminded him that his son was not coming home. As he opened the door, he was greeted by a soldier with a large package in his hands. He introduced himself to the man by saying, "I was your son's friend. I was the one he was rescuing when he died. May I come in for a few minutes? I have something to show you."

As the two began to talk, the soldier told of how the man's son had shared with everyone his and his father's love of fine art.

"I'm an artist," said the soldier, "and I want to give this to you."

As the old man unwrapped the package, the paper gave way to reveal a portrait of the man's son. Though the world would never consider it the work of a genius, the painting featured the son's face in striking detail. Overcome with emotion, the man thanked the soldier, promising to hang the picture

above the fireplace. A few hours after the soldier had departed, the old man set about his task. True to his word, the painting went above the fireplace, pushing away thousands of dollars worth of art. And then the man sat in his chair and spent Christmas gazing at the gift he had been given.

During the days and weeks that followed, the man realized that even though his son was no longer with him, the boy's life would live on because of those he had touched. He would soon learn that his son had rescued dozens of wounded soldiers before a bullet stilled his caring heart. As the stories of his son's gallantry continued to reach him, fatherly pride and satisfaction began to ease his grief. The painting of his son became his most prized possession, far eclipsing any interest in the expensive pieces for which international museums clamored. He told his neighbors the portrait of his son was the greatest gift he had ever received.

The following spring the old man became ill and passed away. The art world was in anticipation that with the collector's passing, and his only son dead, those paintings would be sold at auction.

According to the will of the old man, all of the artworks would be auctioned on Christmas Day, the day he had received his greatest gift.

The day soon arrived, and art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings. Dreams would be fulfilled this day, and greatness would be achieved as many would be able to claim, "I have the greatest collection."

The auction began with a painting that was not on any museum's list. It was the painting of the old man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid, but the room was silent.

"Who will open the bidding with \$100?" he asked.

Minutes passed, and no one spoke. From the back of the room came a voice, "Who cares about that painting? It's just a picture of his son. Let's forget it and move on to the good stuff." Many voices echoed in agreement.

"No, we have to sell this one first," replied the auctioneer. "Now, who will take the son?"

Finally, a neighbor of the old man spoke, "Will you take \$10 for the painting? That's really all I have. And since I knew the boy, I'd like to have it."

After more silence, the auctioneer said, "I have \$10. Will anyone go higher?" Then the auctioneer said, "Going once, going twice, gone."

The gavel fell. Cheers filled the room, and someone exclaimed, "Now we can get on with it and we can bid on the real treasures!"

The auctioneer looked at the audience and announced the auction was over.

Stunned disbelief quieted the room. Someone spoke up and asked, "What do you mean, it's over? We didn't come here to bid on a picture of some old guy's son. What about all of these other paintings? There are millions of dollars worth of art here! I demand that you explain what is going on!" Other voices raised in agreement.

The auctioneer raised his hand and the room quieted. He then replied, "It's very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son gets it all."

Just as those art collectors discovered that Christmas Day, the message is still the same: Because of the love of the Father—a Father whose greatest joy came from His Son, who went away and gave His life rescuing others—whoever takes the Son gets it all!

The Father lovingly gave us His Son. We receive that gift by taking upon us His name, by striving to pattern our lives after His example, and by manifesting our love of Him and the Father through our obedience.

One aspect of obedience is to love our neighbors as ourselves, to care for one another. That sense of caring leads to godlike concern. Elder Marion D. Hanks said, "Tillich has spoken of God's love as 'ultimate concern'—that is, that God cares about as much as can be. We are here to learn to care that much about each other" (*The Gift of Self* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974], 61). This type of ultimate concern can be seen in the example of

the young bishop who, against pressures and problems and at considerable inconvenience, traveled to another city to visit a bereaved widow on the eve of her husband's funeral. The couple had long since moved from the bishop's area, but he had made the effort to be with his good, wonderful old friends at this tender time. He found the elderly lady standing alone beside the body of her beloved of more than half a century. As he comforted her, she said through her tears, "Oh bishop, I knew you would come." [Hanks, Gift of Self, 61; emphasis in original]

The bishop showed obedience to the principle that our love and caring for others is a measure of our love of God. In Matthew 25:40 we find confirmation of loving others and obedience: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

As individuals we are concerned with achieving our full potential, the potential that God knows we have. Christlike love is essential in achieving our potential. We need to view ourselves in an eternal perspective and see ourselves as our Father in Heaven sees us. We need to accept God's love for us and be obedient. If we do this, we will understand and recognize our eternal worth. There is a formula for learning to recognize this eternal worth: watching over and caring for one another, strengthening each other, serving one another, lifting up the hands and arms that hang down, and strengthening the feeble knees. The element that causes this formula to work is to bless individuals as the Savior did. This is only possible if we love unconditionally.

Do we take the opportunity to follow the examples of our Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ as to how we should love one another? Do we follow Their example as we interact with one another? If we follow Their examples, we will respect our differences and forgive our weaknesses and mistakes and love each other unconditionally. We should remember that our lives are shaped by those who love us and by

those who fail to do so. Each day we should ask our Father in Heaven to help us have an understanding of and love for others.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell stated, "Too often we behave as if we were in massive competition with others for God's love. But we have His love, unconditionally and universally; it is our love of Him that remains to be proven, such as through service to others" (*Even As I Am* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], 63).

As individuals we need to learn that we are more important than our mistakes and that we are worthwhile, valuable, and useful. Most important, we need to learn that our Father in Heaven loves us. Thirty years ago I was a faculty member at the BYU—Hawaii campus, known at that time as the Church College of Hawaii. I was called to serve as a regional sports director. The members in the islands love their sports programs and were always anxious to host Young Women regional tournaments. The tournaments were traditionally held on the islands with the greatest population.

Each year the sports director from the small island of Molokai volunteered to host the Young Women regional volleyball tournament. Molokai was not only one of the smallest islands in both LDS and non-LDS population, but the island lacked gymnasium and housing space for the tournament. Nevertheless, I was impressed to investigate the possibility of holding the Young Women regional volleyball tournament on the island of Molokai. The tournament would be held in the month of March, a traditionally rainy month. This would not have been a concern on Oahu or the big island of Hawaii because everything would be housed inside. But on this small island, the area where meals would be served would be totally out-of-doors. The area where more than 100 young women would be housed would also be partially out-of-doors. The sites where the matches would be held were several miles apart, and the young women would be transported from their eating,

sleeping, and tournament sites in large, open, green pineapple trucks.

I arrived on the island in early November to look at the sites and to determine if indeed they would be able to host such a large tournament. The small group of Saints were so excited to have someone believe as they did that they could host the tournament. They had in place all the necessary requirements. I still had a concern about the rain. If it rained, the tournament could not be held. I expressed my concern to the Molokai Church leaders, and their response was, “Sister Durrant, don’t worry. Our Father in Heaven loves us, and we love Him.” How do you question that answer?

When I returned to Oahu, my counselors were still questioning my decision to hold the tournament on Molokai. In December the rain started in the South Pacific, and it ended up being a year with history-making rain and hurricane-type weather throughout all the islands. Still, the Saints in Molokai insisted they would be able to host the tournament. The rain continued. I again visited the island in the middle of February, three weeks before the tournament. I was doubting my decision. How could this tournament happen? The weather forecast was rain through April. The members once again reassured me that they were loved.

I arrived on Thursday at the Molokai airport nine hours before the young women would arrive and the first round of the tournament would begin. Three hours after my arrival the rain stopped. The tournament was a success, and the Molokai Saints’ dream came true—they had the opportunity to host a tournament. The tournament ended with a huge Hawaiian luau, a beautiful experience for all who attended. The young women and their leaders all bore their testimonies of their love for God, and they knew God loved them.

I was with the last group to leave the island. On our way to the airport, the rain started again. The Young Women president turned to me and said, “We told you that our Father in Heaven

loved us.” The rain continued until the first of April. The Saints on the island of Molokai were loved and loved unconditionally.

A more recent example of unconditional love was the African Saints’ response to the visit of President Hinckley. I am sure you were touched as I was at the outpouring of love for the Lord’s prophet. It started with the respect and reverence they showed by all being dressed in white and listening to every word from the mouth of the Lord’s anointed. Tears welled in my eyes as the assembled African Saints waved white handkerchiefs or their hands as the prophet and other leaders left the building where the conference was held. It was also touching to see President Hinckley stop and wave back at them. They showed their unconditional love. That same love was evident in the Marriott Center two months ago when President Hinckley spoke to us. When President Hinckley stood to leave the building, a student started to sing “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.” Do we in all our associations possess and give that unconditional love to all who are around us?

The turning away of individuals from feeling our Father in Heaven’s love is a divisive tool shaped by Satan. The adversary is real, and he does not want us to love our Father in Heaven and His Son with all our hearts. The Lord’s love is consistent—even when we turn away from Him through sin. That consistent love for us will help us through personal adversities. All of life’s problems can be solved and turned into stepping-stones of progress if we love God with all our heart, might, mind, and strength and love ourselves and our neighbors. We need to remember our Father in Heaven looks upon our hearts. It is important to remember we are His children and are products of His workmanship. Trust in God’s love for you with all your heart. Elder Marion D. Hanks assured us that “we are [Heavenly Father’s] children, worthy of love, and we have in us the capacity to love” (*Gift of Self*, 282). The beautiful and tender hymn “I Am a Child of God” says it all.

Another tool that Satan utilizes to turn us against one another is in the form of contention. Love cannot survive in a situation where contention exists. The following scripture is a guide to eliminating contention in our lives: "And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people" (4 Nephi 1:15). Contention causes the Spirit of God to leave, and it does not matter who is right or wrong. If individuals will humble themselves and eliminate pride from their lives, they will see that contention is replaced with love for the individuals with whom they associate. Elder Neal A. Maxwell counseled us, "The men and women of Christ magnify their callings without magnifying themselves [and] seek to exercise power by long-suffering and unfeigned love" ("Put Off the Natural Man, and Come Off Conqueror," *Ensign*, November 1990, 16).

When we eliminate contention, the Spirit of God will return, and we will see each other in a different light and through different eyes. Our lives will once again become an expression of our gratitude for our Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ, which in turn will create a positive influence in the decisions we must make. President Howard W. Hunter said, "Those who are filled with the love of Christ do not seek to force others to do better; they inspire others to do better" ("Excellent Way," 63). Again, contention will not remain if we follow the counsel found in 1 John 4:21: "And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."

Love is a manifestation from God and truly is the most gentle and powerful force in the world. We have been given the key to loving and respecting differences. We must obey our Father in Heaven's commandments and look at everything and everyone through Christlike eyes. We have been given the opportunity to share that powerful gift of God throughout the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Joseph Smith said, "Love is one of the chief characteristics of Deity. . . . A man [or woman] filled with the love of God is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race" (*HC* 4:227; punctuation modernized).

Students who attend this university are part of that plan to extend love to all the world in the form of service. Can we be the kind of individual in the story told of the World War I soldier who asked his officer if he might go out into the no-man's-land between the trenches to bring in one of his comrades, who lay wounded.

"You can go," said the officer, "but it's not worth it. Your friend is probably dead, and you will throw your own life away trying to see him."

But the man went anyway. Miraculously he managed to reach his friend, hoist him onto his shoulders, and bring him back to their company's trench. As the two of them tumbled in together to the bottom of the trench, the officer checked the wounded soldier, then looked kindly at his friend.

"I told you it wouldn't be worth it," he said. "Your friend is dead, and you are wounded."

"It was worth it, sir," said the rescuer.

"How do you mean, worth it? I tell you, your friend is dead," said the officer.

"Yes, sir," the boy answered, "but it was worth it because when I got to him, he said, 'I knew you'd come.'"

As Elder Marvin J. Ashton has told us, "What we love takes our time. That to which we give time, we are apt to love" (*Ye Are My Friends* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982], 12–13).

I challenge each of us to remember we are part of our Father in Heaven's earthly family, and we should love each other as our Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ love us. Look around you and you will see examples of Christlike love in the form of obedience, sacrifice, trust, respect, commitment, loyalty, patience, and tolerance. It is manifested in your families—

brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, grandparents, the earth, this university, our beloved prophet, the temples, and the gospel.

I testify that God and His Son truly love each of us the same. I pray that each of you will find and cling to that one consistent aspect in your life and that you will sense how valued each of you are in our Father in Heaven's eyes.

May God bless you with his choicest blessings. The gospel of Jesus Christ is true. Gordon B. Hinckley is a prophet of God. Joseph Smith is a prophet of God and indeed as a young boy experienced God's love in the Sacred Grove. The restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ is also a manifestation of God's love. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.