

A Man After God's Own Heart

VAUGHN J. FEATHERSTONE

I am delighted to be with all of you here this morning. I appreciate your being here. I would like to speak about having a heart like unto God's own heart, and I want to enlarge on that in a few minutes. However, first I would like to pay a special tribute to a man here at BYU whom I respect greatly—Dr. Hugh Nibley, a man who quietly but brilliantly loves, honors, and defends this great Church. He is a man of great integrity, rare wisdom, and unmatched judgment. What a great blessing he has been to the Church over the years. I love, honor, and respect him. I think no one has ever had to ask which side of an issue Dr. Nibley is on. His work with the Book of Mormon and ancient studies is profound. His talk “Leaders and Managers” is one of the great talks ever given at BYU. All are wonderful tributes to the Church. There is a wise saying that states: “Never walk on the message.” Dr. Nibley has never done that, not once. There are far, far too many who do.

BYU has had a profound influence on the Church in many ways. Dr. Henry B. Eyring, who is the commissioner of Church Education, is in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Two of the Quorum of the Twelve are past presidents of BYU—Dallin Oaks and Jeffrey

Holland. I think that is a marvelous tribute to this university and to the student body here.

Years ago Russell LeBaron Briggs, a member of the Harvard Law School, gave a speech. He told of a student who came in one day, and the dean asked him why he had not been there the day before to take a test. The student said, “I wasn't feeling very well, sir.”

Dean Briggs said, “I think you will find, my young friend, that in life most of the work in the world is done by people who aren't feeling very well.”

We will never know how much Rex Lee has done while he was not feeling very well. He has added greatly to the stature of BYU. He is also a man of great integrity, a man who has been a wonderful president here and has lifted and moved this institution. We should never forget the days of President Rex Lee. He has done it well and as well as it could be done, and he did it when he was not feeling very well. God bless you, President Lee.

Vaughn J. Featherstone was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 12 September 1995.

I just want to say a word about LaVell Edwards. He is a great coach; I love him. He is a great man. There are divergent opinions about coaching. You can search this whole world over and find excellent coaches, but you will find few men who love youth and have absolute integrity and an uncompromising standard of values as does LaVell. He stands head and shoulders above almost all others in his profession in character—and character does count.

I imagine sometimes LaVell feels like the man who went into an institution in southern Utah to get a loan. He talked with the banker for about a half an hour, and finally the banker said, “I don’t know whether to give you the loan or not. I’ll tell you what. I have one glass eye, and if you can tell me which one it is, I will let you have the loan.”

Without any hesitation the man said, “It’s your left eye.”

The banker said, “Yes, but how did you know so quickly?”

“It’s the one that showed a little sympathy.”

I imagine LaVell could appreciate a little sympathy about now.

I mentioned I would come back to this theme of having a heart like unto God’s own heart. David is the only man I know who is described as having a heart like unto God’s own heart, in 1 Samuel 13:14 and again in Acts 13:22.

President Harold B. Lee said:

It is my conviction that every man who will be called to a high place in this Church will have to pass [through] tests not devised by human hands, by which our Father numbers them as a united group of leaders willing to follow the prophets of the Living God and be loyal and true as witnesses and exemplars of the truths they teach. [CR, April 1950, p. 101]

I qualify. I am willing to raise my hand high and go where they want me to go and do what

they want me to do and be what they want me to be. I believe with all of my heart that as we measure up, we are going to be tested greatly in this life, more than you will know at this instant. As we think about having a heart like unto God’s own heart, let me talk about the Atonement for a few minutes.

The Atonement was the most exquisite, supernal act of charity ever performed in all eternity. It required the greatest courage and absolute discipline, more than we would ever believe or suppose, and it will have the greatest impact on mankind “so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof” (Moroni 7:36).

The Atonement opens the eyes of our understanding as to what God’s own heart is like. It must have been difficult not only for Jesus to go through but for his Heavenly Father to go through as well.

All of my life I have spoken a great deal about charity, about love, and about mercy; and somehow I have left justice undone and thought justice would take care of itself. Isn’t it interesting that in Alma 42:24 (emphasis added) it describes mercy and justice, and it states all “*his demands*” regarding justice. When it refers to mercy, however, it says, “And . . . mercy claimeth all which is *her own*.” We name our sons Justin and Justice, and we name our daughters Faith, Hope, Charity, and Mercy.

When we think about justice, we have to go back to Alma 12:32, where he talks about “justice . . . according to the supreme goodness of God.” Lately I have decided that I need to talk more about justice. We don’t understand justice completely, and there is so much out in the world that seems unjust and unfair that it is probably a good time to discuss this.

Who suffers most, the guilty or the innocent? The adulterer can go see the bishop. If he or she has truly repented, the bishop can say, on behalf of the Church, “You are forgiven.” And they leave the office and that burden is lifted. What about the innocent? Who suffers

most, the adulterer or the mother and father with a wayward son or daughter?

*Where is my wand'ring boy tonight—
The boy of my tend'rest care,
The boy that was once my joy and light,
The child of my love and prayer?*

*Once he was pure as morning dew,
As he knelt at his mother's knee;
No face was so bright, no heart more true,
And none was so sweet as he.*

*O could I see you now, my boy,
As fair as in olden time,
When prattle and smile made home a joy,
And life was a merry chime!*

*Go for my wand'ring boy tonight;
Go, search for him where you will;
But bring him to me with all his blight,
And tell him I love him still.*

*O where is my boy tonight
O where is my boy tonight?
My heart o'erflows, for I love him, he knows;
O where is my boy tonight?*
[“Where Is My Boy Tonight?” words and music by Reverend Robert Lowry, 1877]

When will that hurt and suffering go away? It won't—not until the straying son or daughter comes back home. Should the innocent suffer? The parents quite often are innocent; and they hurt and they ache and they pray, and the pain will not go away.

Who suffers most, the incest perpetrator or the incest victim? Little ones are sometimes violated at a very tender age.

Who suffers most—the fornicator? the thief? those involved in drugs, homosexuality, and other perversions—or the innocent? Or do sometimes the innocent suffer more—the paraplegic, the quadriplegic, those with debilitating diseases, the “innocent” man or woman who

has been involved in divorce, and dozens of others? I believe sometimes the innocent suffer far, far more than the guilty—and that would not be justice, would it? It wouldn't be fair.

When we think about those who go to the bishop and confess concerns, we often find that lying takes place. Now lying is an interesting thing. A person can lie to a bishop and lie to a stake president—or to a General Authority—but they can't lie to the Spirit. Often people who have been offended have told the truth whereas the offending one tells a lie to the bishop, and the bishop has a difficult time deciding who is telling the truth. Please remember the fault is not in the bishop, and the fault is not in the stake president—for goodness' sake. The fault is in the liar, and that is where we need to put the blame—not with the wonderful bishops and stake presidents.

If I walked down the street and had \$200 in my pocket, and someone walked up to me and stuck a gun in my ribs and said, “Give me your money,” and I handed it to him—even if I had deliberately put the money up where everyone could see it and a person had violated me—I don't have to go to see the bishop to see if a disciplinary council needs to be held on me. I feel bad that I have been violated. For a person who has been involved in incest, who has been involved in abuse of any kind against his or her will (and that includes rape), there is no transgression—not as long as time shall last or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof.

I believe in God's great justice, that for those who are consigned into homes where he knows they will be violated, somehow he will reach down and judge them as if that had never happened. That would only be just. It would only be merciful. And those who have perpetrated great frauds and great deceit and abuse on others may get out of this life without ever having confessed. People may believe that they didn't do it, and so the perpetrator may escape punishment. We all think that is not

fair—the innocent suffer and the guilty do not. No. Justice is “according to the supreme goodness of God,” and by and by, all those who have been guilty will pay the cost. We will either repent or suffer; there isn’t any way around that. I am so grateful for justice.

Now then, if the sinful one can go in and sit down with the bishop and have the burden relieved, then why should not the innocent? There are those who watch a spouse slowly die with cancer—a husband eventually becomes a widower or, if a man dies, a wife will be left alone. There are those who have other kinds of debilitating diseases—for instance, the quadriplegic who goes through a difficult life that way—isn’t it only just that somehow the Atonement cover that kind of suffering? The innocent must be able to find the same relief as the guilty; that would only be just.

In Alma 7 we discover that the Lord suffered not only for the transgressions and sins of the world but for our afflictions and our illnesses and the sicknesses of the world. That is the part of the Atonement that I have missed somehow, and I want to suggest to you it is not left undone. Justice according to the supreme goodness of God will be satisfied. When we have a heart like unto God’s own heart, we know justice will take place. Now, the innocent ones must do the same thing that the guilty do; that is, they must go to him who has a right to lift that off of their hearts.

President Harold B. Lee said, “I came to a night, some years ago, when on my bed, I realized that before I could be worthy of the high place to which I had been called, I must love and forgive every soul that walked the earth” (CR, October 1946, p. 146). If you have been violated, if you have been abused as a child or as an adult, or if you are later on in this life, would you remember that we must forgive the offending one? Justice “according to the supreme goodness of God” means that we do turn it over to him. It will not be left undone. We can have that absolute assurance. That

would only be just. We must take it off of our hearts. Some modern psychiatrists might say, “Well, you don’t get healed that way,” but you do. You do get healed by turning justice over to God and forgiving the offender. We must be merciful if we would obtain mercy. The Lord can lift all burdens from us. Once we turn it over to him and simply say, “It is between that person and God. I forgive,” then the burden will be lifted quietly and easily. If you are sitting here today and have had those problems in the past and can in your heart forgive and simply turn justice over to the Savior, then through his Atonement those sicknesses and illnesses and the abuses will be lifted from you. That would only be just.

We wonder why the Lord permits such things. I was talking with a wonderful lady recently, and we shared this scripture together:

And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained; and he said unto Alma: How can we witness this awful scene? [Now think here about incest and rape and abuse.] Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames.

But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; [That is justice according to the supreme goodness of God.] and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day. [Alma 14:10–11]

The innocent must forgive the perpetrator, then transfer the burden to the Savior; and that is justice. That, again, does not mean that it is

left undone; it just means that we have turned it over to the Savior.

Now, to those who have sinned and have had the experience of having the Atonement wrought in your lives, you are partakers of mercy. I love the Savior for his mercy, and I love mercy with all of my heart and soul. I love justice equally as much.

There is a verse that all of you have heard:

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
All the king's horses
And all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again.*

But the king could, and the king can, and the king will if we will but come unto him. One of the great things that will draw us to him, if we have a heart like unto God's own heart, is to understand what motivated Christ in the great Atonement. It was the greatest and most significant act ever in eternity, as I stated.

Would you also take this second bit of counsel from one who would have a heart like unto God's own heart? There is a statement that says:

*I believe the first test of a truly great man is his humility. I do not mean, by humility, doubt of his own power. . . . All great men . . . have a curious . . . feeling that the greatness is not in them, but through them. . . . And they see something Divine and God-made in every other man they meet, and are endlessly, foolishly, incredibly merciful. [John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3 (Orpington, Kent: George Allen, 1888), p. 266; emphasis in original]*

I believe we would be incredibly merciful if we had a heart like unto God's own heart.

Walter Malone is known for a lot of things; he is in the Tennessee State Hall of Fame. If all he did was write the poem that I am going to quote to you, his name ought to be there. It

provides a Christlike attitude to many things. Many of you will appreciate it. In it we find hope and absolution. The verse is about opportunity. He said:

*They do me wrong who say I come no more
When once I knock and fail to find you in,
For every day I stand outside your door
And bid you wake, and rise to fight and win.*

*Wail not for precious chances passed away,
Weep not for golden ages on the wane!
Each night I burn records of the day;
At sunrise every soul is born again.*

*Laugh like a boy at splendors that have sped,
To vanished joys be blind and deaf and dumb;
My judgments seal the dead past with its dead,
But never bind a moment yet to come.*

*Tho' deep in mire, wring not your hands and weep;
I lend my arm to all who say, "I can!"
No shamefaced outcast ever sank so deep
But yet might arise and be again a man.*

*Dost thou behold thy lost youth all aghast?
Dost reel from righteous retribution's blow?
Then turn from blotted archives of the past
And find the future's pages white as snow.*

*Art thou a mourner? Rouse thee from thy spell;
Art thou a sinner? Sins may be forgiven;
Each morning gives thee wings to flee from hell,
Each night a star to guide thy feet to Heaven.
["Opportunity," Walter Malone]*

Walter Malone had a heart like unto God's own heart. You can't use that beautiful thought in a great verse without having a heart like unto God's. Anyone who can offer hope is blessed in many ways.

I told a little story at the Bountiful Temple dedication. Let me share it with you. A young couple gave birth to a son. They named him Amazing, hoping that somehow he would

live up to his name and do something great. Actually, he never did. In fact, all that he did was rather mundane. He never really accomplished anything great. He married, lived on the family farm, raised a family, and was the brunt of jokes all his life because of his name.

Finally, he said to his wife, “When I die, please do not put my name on the grave marker; maybe that will stop all the jokes.” Later he died, and she was true to her promise but decided there ought to be something inscribed. She had them put “Here lies a man who loved and was faithful to his wife for sixty years.” And now the people read the inscription, then point and say, “That’s amazing!”

I just got a letter today in the office from George Romney’s wife, Lenore. I want to read a couple of sentences:

That you, too, loved George was evident, and how I love you for that. Your recognizing his greatness was wonderful to me. Indeed, ours was a fabulous love story. How I adore him. I believe he was the most wonderful husband in the world.

There is a statement that says, “Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be” (Robert Browning, *Rabbi Ben Ezra* [1864], stanza 1). One day you will understand that and have different feelings about it than you do now.

Marian Wright Edelman told the story of Jean Thompson, who was a teacher:

On the first day of school, Jean Thompson told her students, “Boys and girls, I love you all the same.” Teachers lie. Little Teddy Stollard was a boy Jean Thompson did not like. He slouched in his chair, didn’t pay attention, his mouth hung open in a stupor, his eyes were always unfocused, his clothes were mussed, his hair unkempt, and he smelled. He was an unattractive boy and Jean Thompson didn’t like him.

Teachers have records. And Jean Thompson had Teddy’s. First grade: “Teddy’s a good boy. He shows promise in his work and attitude. But he has a poor

home situation.” Second grade: “Teddy is a good boy. He does what he is told. But he is too serious. His mother is terminally ill.” Third grade: “Teddy is falling behind in his work; he needs help. His mother died this year. His father shows no interest.” Fourth grade: “Teddy is in deep waters; he is in need of psychiatric help. He is totally withdrawn.”

Christmas came, and the boys and girls brought their presents and piled them on her desk. They were all in brightly colored paper except for Teddy’s. His was wrapped in brown paper and held together with scotch tape. And on it, scribbled in crayon, were the words, “For Miss Thompson from Teddy.” She tore open the brown paper and out fell a rhinestone bracelet with most of the stones missing and a bottle of cheap perfume that was almost empty. When the other boys and girls began to giggle she had enough sense to put some of the perfume on her wrist, put on the bracelet, hold her wrist up to the children and say, “Doesn’t it smell lovely? Isn’t the bracelet pretty?” And taking their cue from the teacher, they all agreed.

At the end of the day, when all the children had left, Teddy lingered, came over to her desk and said, “Miss Thompson, all day long, you smelled just like my mother. And her bracelet, that’s her bracelet, it looks real nice on you, too. I’m really glad you like my presents.” And when he left, she got down on her knees and buried her head in her chair and she begged God to forgive her.

The next day when the children came, she was a different teacher. She was a teacher with a heart. And she cared for all the children, but especially those who needed help. Especially Teddy. She tutored him and put herself out for him.

By the end of the year, Teddy had caught up with a lot of the children and was even ahead of some. Several years later, Jean Thompson got this note:

Dear Miss Thompson:

I’m graduating and I’m second in my high school class. I wanted you to be the first to know. Love, Teddy.

Four years later she got another note:

Dear Miss Thompson:

I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I like it. Love, Teddy Stollard.

Four years later, there was another note:

Dear Miss Thompson:

As of today, I am Theodore J. Stollard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I'm going to be married in July. I want you to come and sit where my mother would have sat, because you're the only family I have. Dad died last year.

*And she went and she sat where his mother should have sat because she deserved to be there. [Deval L. Patrick, "Struggling for Civil Rights Now," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 61, no. 3 (15 November 1994): 93–94]*

I think that is the kind of thing we talk about when we talk about having a heart like unto God's own heart. Otherwise we'll live like the person in this little verse by Henry Drummond:

I lived for myself, I thought for myself,

For myself, and none beside —

Just as if Jesus had never lived,

As if He had never died.

[The Greatest Thing in the World (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, n.d.), p. 40]

Van Johnson from Leoma, Tennessee, tells of a personal experience he had in high school:

Mr. Garner Ezell, my high school football coach, insisted on commitment from his players. "I'm committed to you," he said in a booming voice, his bushy eyebrows raised as he paced the locker room. "If you need me, I'm here." I proved myself on the field, winning the best blocker award in sophomore year. Just before junior year, I made a tackle that left me paralyzed from the shoulders down. What can Coach do for me now? I wondered in the hospital.

Coach became a regular visitor. He stood by my bedside with my teammates, recreating games they had played. "See you in a few days," he said as the team filed out.

Sure enough, Coach came back. And before leaving, he always said, "See you in a few days." Coach Ezell made me feel cared about and important. But I wondered how long his concern would last.

Recently, after a good visit, I listened to Mr. Ezell say from my doorway, "See you in a few days." Now he has done that for more than twenty-four years, a coach with a heart like unto God's.

What does one who has a heart like unto God's own heart have? A few years back I was in Canada at a Nathan Eldon Tanner Camp. This training of adult leaders paralleled what we do at Philmont except that we took the training to Canada instead of having them travel all the way to New Mexico. The Church furnished all of our instructors and youth leaders and ran the full-week camp with wonderful members of the Church.

During that week the staff organized a Polar Bear Club. In order to qualify you had to swim at six a.m. four mornings in a row in the cold Elbow River. It had snowed eight inches at an elevation 1,000 feet higher than our camp. They thought I ought to join. I didn't have a swimming suit, so they drove into Calgary fifty miles away and got me one. The first morning I went down to the river with the group. I have always had a difficult time wading into a lake or river slowly. It is just like cutting your finger off a little bit at a time. I would rather have one giant breathtaking shock than the dozens of painful ones that come from slowly wading into the river. I filled my lungs with all the air they could hold so I could not suck in anything else when the shock of the cold water caused me to catch my breath. I dove in and it was ice cold. I swam out to the middle of the river. It was almost chest deep.

In a moment a stake president dove in and came up right beside me. After the shock of cold, he said, "Did I have my glasses on?"

I replied, "I don't know, did you?"

He said he thought he had.

I said, "Swim over to the bank and check."

In a moment he came back, and he said, “I did have them on.”

The Elbow River was flowing about ten to twelve miles an hour, I estimated. I imagined it would have carried his glasses off down the river toward Calgary.

Here was a stake president who had spent hundreds of dollars to drive from Western Canada to Calgary and had brought his whole family with him in an older wood-paneled station wagon, as I recall. He had all the gasoline, lodging, and meal expenses coming and the training fees. I knew it must have been a terrific financial strain on him. I was certain he could not afford \$200 or \$300 for a new pair of glasses.

I walked upstream about twenty or thirty feet. I offered a prayer and asked God to help me find his glasses. Mind you, it was six a.m.; the water was cold and clear but flowing relatively fast. I lay down on my back and floated downstream. I had an impression and stopped. I looked down in the water and thought I could see something glistening on the bottom

of the river. I dove down and came up with the stake president’s glasses and handed them to this great stake president.

I think if you have a heart like unto God’s own heart, you are interested in little things that may not be important to a lot of other people but would be very important to the person involved.

Well, God bless you. It has been wonderful to be here with you. I think if the Savior were here today, he would say to you, to all of you who have served missions, “Thanks so much for serving missions, for working hard and sacrificing and doing all you did.” I think he would say to all of you, “Thank you for studying, for doing what you are doing here and preparing for the rest of your life. Thanks for being clean and sweet and pure. Thanks for being loyal to the Church and sustaining the apostles and prophets.” I think he would say, “I love you and I forgive you and God bless you.” And I say that also, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.