

An Attitude: The Weightier Matters

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I appreciate the music and the humility of the prayer and the courtesy of the introduction, and I am very proud of you girls and your basketball team. I have been following your progress and feel very good about what you have done and certainly congratulate you.

I hope all of you this morning qualify, as I pray I do, for what the psalmist wrote when he said to a certain one that he had been “anointed with the oil of gladness.” I feel that way this morning perhaps largely because of the period of preparation that has permitted me more intensive access to the scriptures and some thought of you and your particular setting.

Sister Hanks and I share many good things as husbands and wives should. We share, among other things, good literature and good humor. She pinned on our refrigerator recently, for instance, a panel from “Hagar the Horrible” in the funny papers. In the first panel Mrs. Hagar is asked by her friends, “How did you happen to marry a man who travels so much?” Mrs. Hagar answers in the next panel, “I don’t know, just lucked out I guess.”

Then I pinned one on the refrigerator. It had Hagar, in the first of two panels, with all the military accoutrements—his sword and his shield and all the rest—heading resolutely for

the door with the announcement to his wife and son, “I go exploring.” In the next panel he is gone, the artist has shown by the “whooshes” that the door has slammed, and Mrs. Hagar says to their son, “Go let your father out of the closet.”

That leads me directly to what I want to say this morning. Sometime ago I started exploring a theme in one of these devotionals. I didn’t get much beyond the borders of the first country, so to speak, and later was somewhat discomfited by the fact that I had, through the pressures of time, not really spoken adequately about what I had wanted to. And so this morning I am going to make another brief effort, though under the same restraints.

In the Church we are all teachers in principle, and most of us, perhaps all of us one way or another, are teachers in fact. Some are professionals, and many of the rest of us find our way into a formal classroom setting sometime in our lives. We are home teachers, or ought to

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be, or visiting teachers. By assignment we are all missionary teachers. In a home we are surely teachers, or in a neighborhood, or as counselors or comforters or friends.

I sat on the airplane Saturday morning enroute to Louisville, Kentucky, with a young friend, a medical person, who said that for years he has been singing in the Tabernacle Choir and has not been able to attend priesthood quorum meeting. Under the new meeting schedule he has been earnestly looking forward to a more consistent attendance. The week before the first consolidated meetings began, he was invited by the bishop to teach Primary. You will discover that that means he cannot go to priesthood meeting again for a while. The incident reemphasizes what I am saying—that sooner or later most of us end up doing some formal teaching, and if we do not we are yet teachers in other ways along the route.

As a youngster I had mixed experiences with teachers, some very, very good experiences and some not quite so good. The latter bothered me and caused me to be less faithful in attendance I than I should have been and wish now had been. But I didn't really enjoy the experiences because I was not comfortable with the teachers or the kind of teaching I was exposed to. I know now they were very good men and that part of the problem was mine. But I also think that my youthful reactions were somewhat justified. Later, when I had some outstanding teachers, I became even more sure that anybody who undertakes to teach anything ought to do some very serious thinking. At that age I began to formulate, and in a measure formalized by writing down, some feelings about teaching. I didn't know then that I would spend a major portion of my life in that endeavor, but I did have some very strong responses to and experiences with and feelings about being a teacher. A few of those I want to share this morning, basically in terms of outline because there will be no adequate

time to pursue them fully. But perhaps the outline will be sufficient to communicate the viewpoint. I label it *my* viewpoint. Much of what I say is my opinion, and I take responsibility for that but hope that what I say will motivate you to do your own thinking, which is of course my purpose in being here.

Know the Scriptures

The first of these suggestions for me and you: That we teach from a strong foundation in the scriptures and with consistent attendance to the study of those scriptures. Christ answered the cynical question of the Sadducees concerning marriage in the resurrection, a resurrection in which they acknowledged no belief, "Ye do err not knowing the scriptures." And so do we err if we do not know them. The scriptures center in the Lord Jesus Christ because it is he who is the center point in the plan of God for all of us and for all of his children. As we read the scriptures it should be with him and his mission in mind—his life, his love, his teachings, his atoning sacrifice. These are the unifying heart of the holy books.

As I drove down this morning I was thinking about what the scriptures themselves teach us about reading the scriptures. There are so many significant and strong affirmations about *searching* and *seeking* and *asking* and *knocking*. One of them is the report of Paul who, having been forced to leave Thessalonica, went to Berea and reported that they in Berea were nobler than those in Thessalonica in that they "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily [to know] whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

In the twenty-ninth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy is a verse of special significance, perhaps a little less known than many to which we might refer:

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and

to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of the law. [Deut. 29:29]

That is beautiful and significant, every word and every concept. There are things still secret, as it were, with God. But there is much he has revealed that belongs to us and to our children forever in order that we may do that which he wants us to do.

I repeat, we should be reading regularly in the scriptures to form a foundation for any kind of competence in understanding and teaching the fundamental principles of life, the *revealed* principles of life and salvation that God himself has given us. We read to know, to understand, to apply, to gain faith. There is much more in the scriptures that should be mentioned—the beauty, the comfort, the inspiration, the motivation, the encouragement, the enhancement of humility—that go with these fundamentals when we read for purpose and those purposes form for us a basis on which to live and share.

So, *get a foundation*. And this cannot be done with an occasional attendance at class, though that of course is obviously helpful. It requires personal effort and search.

I Know

When we teach it must be in a context of faith, not doubt. Seek, search, knock, ask? *Yes*. Question? *Yes*. But in a spirit of inquiry and discovery. Doubting, if it motivates us to move in the right direction and begin to search, can be constructive. But doubting can immobilize and enervate and destroy. We need to search and teach in the context of faith.

I could illustrate this many ways, and with some sorrow, because I have known some whose faith I did not question but who undertook, I think with proper purpose in the beginning, to question, to challenge, in a manner that became doubt-engendering, in a way in which those who were influenced couldn't quite handle. We must not hesitate to say "I

know" when we do know. In Alma 36 it is written that he "stood upon [his] feet" and manifested unto the people that he had been born of God. Many times it is recorded that the prophets, the teachers, the leaders were moved to stand and testify, and did so. I believe in reading widely, in searching other sources that are good, but the voice that is listened to, the voice that means something, is the voice that says, "*This I know. I have the conviction. The Spirit has borne witness to me that this is true.*"

I Do Not Know

We must learn how to say also, as we testify of what we do know, "I do not know," because as we have just been reminded, there are matters that have not been revealed, much that is yet to be revealed. Teach principles that have consequences in salvation, not those details that may be questionable because there has been no clear revelation that would tie them with our salvation.

I for one feel no uneasiness when there is concern and questioning and when viewpoints are adopted that are different from my own. But I have great concern when people who have such viewpoints, which in all honesty I do not think are essential to my salvation or theirs or yours, then set them up as the measuring rod of everyone else's faith, and find those lacking or wanting who do not agree with them.

Wise Teaching

In the scriptures there are so many refreshing examples of wise teaching, of honest acknowledgment of limitation, or unwillingness to seek to force acquiescence in matters of detail that have no consequence in salvation or the faith and good life that lead to it. In 1 Nephi 22, for instance, is a statement about the "more part of all the tribes" that had been led away and scattered to the isles of the sea, with these instructive comments: "Whither they are *none of*

us knoweth, save that we know that they have been led away” (1 Ne. 22:4; emphasis added).

Nephi teaches with power the great principle that God reveals his truths by the Spirit to the prophets, and explains the teachings on the brass plates relating to the future of the family of Israel. He does *not know* the details of their places of dispersion, but he does *know* that there will come a time when God

gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth; and he numbereth his sheep, and they know him; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep, and in him they shall find pasture. [1 Ne. 22:25]

He testifies that the writings of the prophets are true and that

they testify that a man must be obedient to the commandments of God. . . .

Wherefore, if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved at the last day. [1 Ne. 22:30, 31]

In 1 Nephi 11 is recorded the sobering inquiry from an angel to Nephi if he knows “the condescension of God.” In effect the Lord seems to be asking if Nephi understands how close to man God is willing to come, how far he is willing to go to help us, how much he loves us, how much he does and is willing to do for us. Read again Nephi’s humble answer: “I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Ne. 11:17).

What a wonderful thing to know and what an honest attitude of humble limitation!

In Alma, the seventh chapter, is the record of Alma’s choice instructions revealing his attitude toward teaching and testimony. The prophet *knows* that God has power to do all things. He *knows* the vital truth that Christ is coming. He does *not know* exactly when. He

does know that he is called to cry repentance, looking to that coming.

For behold, I say unto you there be many things to come; and behold, there is one thing which is of more importance than they all—for behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people.

Behold, I do not say that he will come among us at the time of his dwelling in his mortal tabernacle; for behold, the Spirit hath not said unto me that this should be the case. Now as to this thing I do not know; but this much I do know, that the Lord God hath power to do all things which are accorded to his word.

But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying—Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. [Alma 7:7–9; emphasis added]

In Alma 40 is another great example of teaching wisdom, a classic example of great faith in principle and perhaps a little impatience with too much emphasis on detail. Alma knows there will be a resurrection—“a time appointed that all shall come forth from the dead.” He does not know exactly when, or in what stages, and is satisfied to know that God knows these things. He announces that there is a space between death and the resurrection and inquires of the Lord what becomes of men during this time. He receives an answer.

Behold, there is a time appointed that all shall come forth from the dead. Now when this time cometh no one knows but God knoweth the time which is appointed.

Now, whether there shall be one time, or a second time, or a third time, that men shall come forth from the dead, it mattereth not; for God knoweth all these things; and it sufficeth me to know that this is

the case—that there is a time appointed that all shall rise from the dead.

Now there must needs be a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection.

And now I would inquire what becometh of the souls of men from this time of death to the time appointed for the resurrection?

Now whether there is more than one time appointed for men to rise it mattereth not; for all do not die at once, and this mattereth not all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men.

Therefore, there is a time appointed unto men that they shall rise from the dead; and there is a space between the time of death and the resurrection. And now, concerning this space of time, what becometh of the souls of men is the thing which I have inquired diligently of the Lord to know; and this is the thing of which I do know.

And when the time cometh when all shall rise, then shall they know that God knoweth all the times which are appointed unto man.

. . . Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God, who gave them life. [Alma 40:4–11; emphasis added]

Alma testifies fervently and firmly and unequivocally of great principles but, I repeat, seems even a trifle impatient when people want to know details. Of many matters, it is written, he would “not say,” though he was willing on occasion to offer his personal opinion. (See Alma 40:20.)

So was Paul, as recorded in the great fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians (see especially verses 34–36).

Don’t be unwilling to say, “I do not know,” because in truth there is much we do not know. Teach principles that have consequence in salvation. Avoid judging the faith of others on the basis of your own strong personal opinions in

matters that may not in fact really significantly relate to salvation.

It is of great consequence for us to know that God created man and that he created the earth. Is it of equal importance to know the method or methods and the time involved? I do not think so. I know that God created the earth and I know why:

Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited; and he hath created his children that they should possess it. [1 Ne. 17:36]

I know that man is coeternal with God and that he clothed us, our eternal individuality, in spirit form and then made it possible for us to have earth life through his gift, through his love. I know that he is our Creator and that his children are his special and crowning creation. But I take great comfort in personal conversations I had with President McKay some years ago when I was concerned with these matters. His answer was about what I have given you. He said, “It would do no violence to my faith to learn that God had formed man in one way or another.” Many times I was touched as he taught us of God’s love, his marvelous Fatherhood, his power, or the holiness of our Heavenly Father. He testified that God created this earth and us. But the methods and time seemed not so significant to him, nor do they to me.

In my youth I memorized from a great book two sentences which I still remember that reflect a strong sense of wisdom and of appreciation for true faith. A young minister whose mentor was an older, self-sacrificing priest was going to leave his vocation because the older man was being unfairly treated by his administrative superiors. The older priest dissuaded him from resigning with these words, “You have inquisitiveness and tenderness. You are sensible to the distinction between thinking and doubting. But best of all you do not have that bumptious security that springs from

dogma rather than from faith.” (A. J. Cronin, *Keys of the Kingdom*.)

I seek faith. I am uncomfortable in the presence of “bumptious security that springs from dogma” and express my own strong feeling that it is of utmost importance that we value love, faith, repentance, obedience, morality, integrity, and walking in the spirit, and that we never undervalue these principles at the expense of less essential matters which may preoccupy some.

I believe, and I testify, that the principles God has revealed concerning our salvation are indispensably important to us and mark the path to his presence and that the only evil any of us can ultimately experience is to be separated from him, from Christ, from our dear ones.

The Weightier Matters

It is my conviction that in our lives and teachings we ought to emphasize the weightier matters of the law, as Christ himself taught them. You will remember that as he castigated certain ones for their hypocrisy he said, . . .

ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin [tithe in kind in their day], and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. [Matt.23:23]

I love the story of the man who, face-to-face with the Savior, pleaded for help for his tragically afflicted son. He had gone to others seeking assistance and they could not help him. Now he came directly to the Lord. Christ asked him if he believed: “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” Do you remember what followed?

And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. [Mark 9:23–24]

The child was healed. This honest, humble father knew some things very well, though he apparently had problems with some other matters. He knew who it was he faced. He knew that Jesus was the Christ and had full confidence that he could heal his son.

The Great Commandments

Teach the great commandments: To love God; to love our neighbor as ourself; to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; to repent and qualify for God’s beautiful promises to forgive, forget, and never mention the sins of the truly penitent; to receive and honor the ordinances of the gospel; and to walk in the light of the Spirit, enduring the tribulations that come to all of God’s children in this mortal experience.

Link Arms with Good People

I testify earnestly that we ought to join forces with good people who are seeking the same objectives we are and that we should walk with them as brothers toward those wholesome goals as far as we can go.

I sat in a meeting at a university seminar where Dr. John A. Widtsoe in his older years was one of several panelists speaking to the subject of alcoholism. One stood representing a great Christian denomination and justified the use of alcohol in moderation, declaring that there is nothing wrong with such use. A second speaker represented another part of the Christian world, a young man of considerable conviction, who announced that he differed with the viewpoint of the preceding speaker. He said, “I look upon alcohol, used even as it is used by men who think they are moderate, as a tool of the devil.” He talked about the terrible destruction visited upon humankind through alcohol. Dr. Widtsoe was the last speaker. He was an internationally famous chemist and a man of celebrated intellectual accomplishment. He stood and said, “I think there is little need for me to add much today. I link arms with my young brother in what he has just said and

walk with him.” And then he said, “Because I am a chemist and know something of the nature and effects of alcohol, perhaps I could talk a little about that.” And he did, and let it go at that.

I have never forgotten the imagery, and I have enjoyed the blessing frequently of trying to practice it. We must link arms with good people who have similar or common objectives and walk with them as long and as far as we can.

Learn and Understand Alma 39:11

It is the declaration of a sad father who, himself not always perfect, has some memories that are unpleasant for him to live with, but who has sorely repented and is God’s agent. He finds it necessary to speak the sad message to his own son who has consorted with a professionally immoral person. The words are sobering to me in contemplation of my one day meeting my missionary father who died when I was a baby. Said Alma to his son Corianton concerning the Zoramites, “When they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words.”

Gather the Manna Daily

Do you remember the great lesson the Lord taught the children of Israel in providing for them manna that they had to gather daily? They had been slaves in Egypt and had forgotten their relationship with the Lord. To teach them and prove them the Lord required that they gather the manna every day except over the Sabbath. They could not collect it or store it. It had to be gathered every day. (See Exodus 16.)

Spiritually, that condition of closeness with the Lord through his Spirit is like manna to us. We cannot live well without it, and it must be gathered every day. It isn’t enough to have known, to have read, to have given, to have prayed, to have obeyed. That great series of verses in Alma 5 that move me so much begin

with, “If ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, *can ye feel so now?*” (See Alma 5:26–31; emphasis added.)

Teach and Testify of Christ

I repeat that it is my conviction that the only evil that can ultimately happen to us is to be separated from him, from the Father, from our loved ones.

I was trying to teach a lovely young lady once who had terrible problems. The major difficulty was that she had concluded there was no hope for her. She had cut herself off, shut the door. She would not listen to and really didn’t want to hear promises that she felt applied to everybody else but not to her. She was making the most critical mistake that can be made, and that is to negate for her the gift God had given in the life of his Beloved Son, who himself gave his life willingly for all of us. She was sure it couldn’t happen to someone who had made the sad mistakes she had.

We read through the verses you might have chosen, some of you perhaps with greater wisdom than I did, out of Isaiah 1 and the fifty-eighth section of the Doctrine and Covenants and Ezekiel 18 and 33, the promises of God’s forgiveness that state that our sins are wiped out in his heart and mind when we truly repent, for he will never mention them; they are gone. Truly repentant, penitent children of God are forgiven. She seemed not to comprehend, nor to believe.

I turned then to two other verses that have become so precious to me and read them. I share them today with you: “And now, my beloved brethren, seeing that our merciful God has given us so great knowledge concerning these things, let us *remember him*, and *lay aside our sins*, and *not hang down our heads*, for we are *not cast off*” (2 Ne. 10:20; emphasis added).

I watched the warmth and beauty of the Spirit of the Lord penetrate the hard curtain that had shut her off—by her own doing. I saw a tear come. Then we were able to turn to this

wonderful ninth chapter of the book of Moroni to read a line that I wish all of us truly understood and had mastery of. Mormon is finishing his last letter to his son. He has reminded Moroni of some terrible problems of the time. He has been candid, laying out his own sad view of things as they are. In summation he declared the most unpleasant thing people could hear from a prophet, that he could not recommend them unto God. But then he says to his own son, "I recommend thee unto God," and bears his witness and delivers his valedictory to Moroni in these marvelous words:

My son, be faithful in Christ [that is where it starts, and that is the heart of it all]; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers [that is, his resurrection], and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever. [Moroni 9:25]

Don't let infamy, don't let sin, don't let what is happening in the world weigh you down. That is not what Christ is all about; don't let it grieve you. *Let him lift you up.* And let all that he represents for us rest in your minds forever.

Enos, finishing his unusual experience, wrote,

And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father. [Enos 27]

I desire the faith of Enos. I believe it is my privilege to have that faith the way Enos received it. I believe it is my responsibility to share that faith in humility with anyone I may, in my own household and neighborhood and beyond. I will declare, for I do know some things very well. And I will be willing to announce that I do not know some other things. What I know is that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ, that there is a plan for man centering in Christ, our advocate with our father, the mediator, he who came not in the form of an angel but in the seed of Abraham in order that he might understand our infirmities; for we do not have a high priest who is unfamiliar with our problems. He is very familiar with them. The purpose of his program is to give us immortality and to open the door to creative life for us eternally, to help us to find joy and to share happiness, to build, to strengthen, to exude the warm and beautiful spirit that comes when we truly know God and Christ and love each other and undertake to share what is good. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.