

Fear Not

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If my fourteen-year-old son's vocabulary is any indication, it is in vogue to be "weird" or feel "weird" or act "weird." I'd like to begin this morning telling you of a truly "weird" experience I had last year.

A "Weird" Dream

Some of you will remember that last November we had a concert on campus featuring Billy Joel. Now President Holland and I aren't quite up to the Billy Joel kind of performance (we are more into the St. George Senior Citizens Chorus), so we didn't attend. But the night after the Billy Joel concert, I had a very unusual dream—a "weird" dream, I think it is safe to say.

I dreamed that Billy and I were driving down the highway talking about his experience at BYU. I was driving the car and completely in control, but suddenly I became terrified of something that was ahead. So, instead of continuing on our journey, I veered off the road and sent the car careening over the edge of a steep cliff. Instead of the crash landing expected, we were somehow plucked out of the car and perched safely on a ledge hidden from view. We sat comfortably, watching huge crowds of people milling down below. They

were coming and going and looking around but never discovering the occupants of the battered car.

When I awoke the next morning, I was incredulous! What on earth—I said to myself—would a forty-five-year-old mother hen to thousands of BYU students have in common with Billy Joel? Now, at this point, I suppose I do have to confess to you that one of my life-long secret desires has been to play the drums in a rock band, but that didn't seem to be adequate motivation for a 3-D, Cinerama, Dolby sound, full-length "weird" dream.

I pondered a long time about that dream—and whether it is the right interpretation or not, I finally decided that I had associated Billy Joel's concert performance for you with my own frequent assignments to speak to the same kind of crowd in this *same* monstrous hall and with every one of those *same* eyes upon me. I surmised that neither of us needed to put up with such performance fears any longer, so I just detoured us over the cliff. Unfortunately, I forgot to ask Billy if he wanted to accompany

Patricia T. Holland, wife of Jeffrey R. Holland, gave this devotional address at Brigham Young University on 15 September 1987.

me. But that's the price he had to pay for riding with me. Next time he may want to take Greyhound.

Nonsense and rock concerts aside, I think I really did identify with the public performance of such a concert and subconsciously preferred to hide in safety, far from the gaze of the crowd. Anonymity has always seemed pretty appealing to me, yet here I am—and there you are—and the show must go on, again!

I tell that ridiculous, but true, story for a purpose this morning. I have wondered and worried and prayed about what to say to you. And I have felt that perhaps some of you, who may feel a bit shy and more than a little overwhelmed at a place like BYU, need to know that the rest of us are pretty shy, too, and that lots of people—maybe most people—have fears about new experiences with people we don't know. As long as I'm already on the analyst's couch with my dream, I will go on to confess that I have always had my fair share of fears, too, and maybe you have as well. Life has lots of challenges, and some of them can be fearful.

The Real Problem

I remember the fear I had coming here as a new student. I was terrified that I wouldn't be able to pass my exams or even find the classrooms. I was afraid I wouldn't get along with my new roommate. I worried that my money would not last, and I was certain that I would never get asked for a date. On occasion, I still awaken in the night in a cold sweat, having dreamed I had gone a whole semester without attending a class I'd registered for and that my transcript had incompletes and UWs stamped across the front of it. I have, in the course of my forty-plus years, managed to worry about almost everything.

That's the bad news. The good news is that almost none of the things I have worried about or been afraid of have ever happened. I suppose that is why Elder Packer said recently,

“You can't tell me worrying doesn't help because the things I worry about never happen.”

So I have come to realize, as perhaps you need to, that our real problem is not so much fear of things or people or places but rather fear itself. I've learned, as many of you have, that such anxiety is one of Satan's greatest tools, and it needs to be opposed.

Replace Fear With Faith

In a motherly sort of way, I plead with each one of you to understand that *your opportunity to learn* can greatly magnify your faith—faith in yourself, faith in your future, faith in a God who is your father and who loves you. Please understand this right now—God is *not* a vengeful, punitive god who is somehow looking for new ways to torment, embarrass, and punish you. For too much of my young life that is the way I saw him, and I often obeyed him out of guilt and anxiety rather than faith and genuine desire. But you—*you* are here at *the* university that teaches of a living God, of which Elder George Q. Morris, a former member of the Council of the Twelve, once said, “It is called the Brigham Young University, but *it is the University of the Kingdom of God*” (Ernest L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years* [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975] 4:391; emphasis added). Please understand, you have come to a place designed by God, governed by apostles, and presided over by a prophet to help you discover your divine potential. I promise you that if you will treat it seriously and sacredly, faith will begin to replace fear, and *you* will stand confident before God *and man*.

Brother Dennis Rasmussen of our philosophy department has written:

To be a child of God is to share his divine nature. But that nature is still potential in man, and the purpose of life (and I might add learning) is to make

*it actual. . . Man has invented many names for himself; most of them are wrong. But man wears them like labels and often comes to believe them. Who has not worn with shame and mute belief the name of Stupid or Awkward or Nobody or even Wicked? But God calls to man with a new name that only God can speak. He addresses his children born in his image and asks, "Can you look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?" (Alma 5:19.) [Dennis Rasmussen, *The Lord's Question: Thoughts on the Life of Response* (Provo, Utah: Keter Foundation, 1985), pp. 7–8; emphasis added]*

We owe it to that divine potential in us to look up to God *without* fear. Some of you wonder whether God even knows you exist, or if he does know, does he care that you exist? He declares in reply that he knows every one of you and loves you dearly and can call *each* of you by *name*. He has promised that *the very hairs of your head are all numbered to him*. "The very hairs of your head"—that proclaims a *lot* of fatherly interest. He has also declared that not even one sparrow will fall to the ground unnoticed. "Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than . . . sparrows" (Matthew 10:30–31).

Did you notice the way the Lord begins that scripture? "Fear ye not." Have you noticed how often the Lord prefaces so many things that he has to say with the words *fear not*? He knows that all people struggle with fears and anxieties and problems. He wants so much for us to know that. If we will but come to him, he will comfort and reassure us. And he will carry us in his arms until we are able to walk by ourselves.

For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. [Isaiah 41:13, 10]

"I Will Not Forget Thee"

As a new school year begins, I know that some of the pressures of study, finances, employment, *and dating* weigh heavily upon you. Take your fears to the Lord. Talk to him and listen to him. Then, if you feel a spiritual motion as tiny as the touch that a butterfly's wing might make, acknowledge it, heed it, and let his influence work upon you. The Lord wants you to succeed even more than you want to yourself. Have faith in a perfect Father's love, fearing nothing. Remember that love is promised not just to those who have never made a mistake, but that love is promised to every one of us—who have all made mistakes.

I think I have a glimpse of that kind of love because of my own experience of giving birth to three beautiful children. I have discovered that the child who is at the moment content and happy often has little need of me. That gladsome child usually runs away to play. But the child who has made a mistake, has faltered, or is wounded or frightened turns quickly to come back home for reassurance. As that child draws near unto me, nothing—I repeat, nothing—can stop the opening of my heart or the reaching out of my arms to enfold him or her into my protection.

Is anything more powerful than a mother's love? The scriptures say *one thing* is more powerful.

But, behold, Zion hath said: The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me—but he will show that he hath not.

For can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget [As unwilling as I am to believe it, Pat Holland may forget her children. Yea, earthly mothers may forget], yet will I not forget thee, O house of Israel.

Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands. [1 Nephi 21:14–16; emphasis added]

Christ's compassionate atonement is more powerful than even a mother's love. He has engraven us upon the palms of his hands, and those marks make certain that he will never

forget us. I bear my witness that he will never forget us. I promise that we will not forget you either. We love you and pray for your success. "Fear not," in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.