

“Fear Not, Little Flock”

HOWARD W. HUNTER

It's always a delight to be with you on this campus. My children and grandchildren have attended this university, and I love it very much. Thank you for your attendance today. President Holland informed me that you would probably all be sitting down, so I have decided to do the same if you will permit me.

Surviving the Hard Times

I know enough about your busy and hectic lives to know that you sometimes get frustrated. You might even worry a little bit from time to time. I know all about that. You're probably somewhere between midterms and final papers, and the semester seems as if it will never end. Some of you may be farther behind than you thought it was possible to be in a single semester. I've had semesters like that. They pass. *You* may not pass, but semesters do. Now you *know* I'm kidding, don't you? You're going to do just fine, even if the bank has called to offer a special tutor in balancing your checkbook.

My message to you today is to “fear not, little flock.” It is to encourage you to rejoice in the great blessings of life. It is to invite you to feel the great thrill of gospel living and our Father in Heaven's love. Life is wonderful, even in the hard times, and there is happiness,

joy, and peace at stops all along the way, and endless portions of them at the end of the road.

Sure, there are plenty of things to worry about—some of them very serious things—but that is why we speak in gospel terms of faith, and hope, and charity. As Latter-day Saints, ours is “the abundant life,” and we try to emphasize our blessings and opportunities while we minimize our disappointments and worries. “Search diligently, pray always, and be believing,” the scripture says, “and all things shall work together for your good” (D&C 90:24). I want to remind you of that promise.

Set aside any worries you may have long enough to go with me to Independence, Missouri, where we will observe the worries of another generation of Saints. The year is 1833; the Church is only three years old and is struggling for its very survival.

On Saturday, July twentieth of that year, a mob destroys the Church printing office in Independence, Missouri, and tars and feathers

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two members of the Church. Three days later, Church leaders are forced to sign a written agreement to leave Jackson County by January first of the next year. Upon learning of this from Oliver Cowdery, who was sent from Jackson County to report these unfortunate events to Joseph Smith, the prophet calls a meeting to discuss the matter. It is decided that all “measures should be immediately taken to seek redress by the laws of our country” (HC 1:417).

Church leaders in Missouri approach the governor of the state and are advised by the state attorney general to seek redress under the provisions of the law. This does not please local nonmembers, however, and mobs destroy several Mormon homes and whip a number of men. Four days later, on 4 November 1833, one Mormon and two Missourians die in a skirmish on the Big Blue River. The violence continues, but local judges refuse again and again to issue warrants against the mobsters. You know what follows. The Church members faced death and difficulty for well over a decade before they finally fled to the Rocky Mountains.

Some survived these difficult times spiritually, and others did not. Those who survived knew and believed and did certain things—things that those who fell away did not know or do. What they knew was the reality and divinity and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. They knew that Joseph Smith was his chosen prophet. Later, they sustained Brigham Young in that same capacity, then John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff, and so on. What they did, knowing these things to be true, was exercise their faith, in spite of their worries and concerns. They were believers, and there was peace and joy and safety in the Church as established and led by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Please remember this one thing. If our lives and our faith are centered upon Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong. On the other hand, if our

lives are not centered on the Savior and his teachings, no other success can ever be permanently right.

I commend to you the revelations of God as the standard by which we must live our lives and by which we must measure every decision and every deed. Accordingly, when you have worries and challenges, face them by turning to the scriptures and the prophets.

Academic Worries

Let’s begin with your academic worries. You do not need me to catalog the academic challenges of this week or this month, or to remind you how long and discouraging some days can be. You worry about papers and tests, about grades and classes and graduate school. For man of you, being here is a financial sacrifice, but you are here anyway. That’s a good sign.

It might help to remember that by laboring here you are answering a divine mandate to study and learn “things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, . . . things which are at home, things which are abroad; . . . and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms” (D&C 88:79).

In this connection, consider the oft-quoted words of Nephi;

I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.
[1 Nephi 3:7]

The Lord will help you in your school work if you give your own very best academic effort and try to live worthy of his help.

The scriptures will not tell you what classes to take from which professors, or what major to choose, or what topic you should select for the paper that is due Friday morning. But what

they do have to offer on the subject of your university career is infinitely more important. They tell you how and why to learn; they encourage you to prepare and grow. You recognize these words:

Seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. [D&C 88:118]

Whether the subject is scripture or sociology, you cannot ignore study or faith if you wish to succeed. At least have faith that you can succeed, that every semester eventually comes to an end, that your righteous efforts will be rewarded. Of course, no amount of faith will help you pass this afternoon's pop quiz if you haven't done the required reading. When Ernest L. Boyer was on campus last year, he said the only universal prayer offered in school was, "Dear Lord, don't let her call on me today." So work hard, *and* pray, but do not worry.

While you study the world and its many problems, resist the temptation a few have to be cynical. Do not lose sight of the divine wonder all about you. Do not give yourself cause to share the regrets expressed by the dying young man in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*:

The windows of his room looked out into the garden, and [the] garden was a shady one, with old trees in it which were coming into bud. The first birds of springs were flitting in the branches, chirruping and singing at the windows. And looking at them and admiring them, he began suddenly begging their forgiveness . . . , "Birds of heaven, happy birds, forgive me, for I have sinned against you Yes," he said, "there was such a glory of God all about me; birds, trees, meadows, sky, only I . . . dishonored it all and did not notice the beauty and glory." [Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Norton Critical Edition, rev. and ed.

Ralph E. Matlaw, tr. Constance Garnett (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), p. 268]

Remember the Lord's encouragement in these matters. Look at life and its wonders "with cheerful hearts and countenances, . . . [for] the fullness of the earth is yours, . . . Yea, all things which come of the earth . . . are made for the benefit and use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul" (D&C 59:15–19).

Wonder and reverence for God's handiwork is a form of worship, and the spiritually attentive soul will find such wonders in one's studies, in the sky and the mountains, and, believe it or not, in that most unique of all creations, your roommate.

Financial Worries

When you're not worrying about classes, you probably spend a fair amount of time trying to balance your funds between tuition and pizza and a little gasoline for the car, if you have one. Look to the scriptures. You have a lot of company if you are poor. You have read these verses;

And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. [Matthew 8:19–20]

You will find, as you follow Christ, that the path to him often leads through poverty. And if you are not struggling financially, your trail may be the greatest of all—prosperity. Whatever your financial circumstances may be, there are some principles that apply to you.

Pay a full tithe and be generous in your other offerings.

Acknowledge that whatever wealth you have, great or small, monetary or otherwise, belongs to the Lord and is to be used as he directs.

Do not covet what you have or what you do *not* have. Brigham Young once said, “I am more afraid of covetousness in our Elders [and sisters] than I am of the hordes of hell” (DBY, p. 306). Things eventually work out financially; hang on and have faith.

Challenges of Many Kinds

I mentioned roommates a moment ago and heard a few of you laugh a bit. One of the more trying aspects of student life can be living with your roommates—or even if some cases, with spouses or parents or children. There is room in every home, however humble, however temporary, for repentance and forgiveness, for charity and service. If something is wrong, it should be dealt with, but “only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41).

If you are inclined to be troubled about roommates or spouses, try to remember to worry less about your own welfare and more about that of others. If charity is what every apartment needs—and what home doesn’t—you be the one to initiate and encourage it. Read Mormon on the subject, who said, “Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love” (Moroni 7:48). Someone has to begin, to try, to reach out. Someone has to assume responsibility and make good things happen. Why not you? Why not now?

Unless I’m seriously mistaken, many of you also worry about courtship, marriage, and starting a family. You probably will not find the name of your future spouse in Nephi’s vision or the book of Revelation; you probably will not be told it by an angel or even by your bishop. Some things you must work out for yourself. Have faith and be obedient, and blessings will come. Try to be patient. Try not

to let what you don’t have blind you to that which you do have. If you worry too much about marriage, it can canker the very possibility of it. Live fully and faithfully as one person before having undue anxiety about living as two. If you are married and struggling, your course is the same: have faith, be obedient, and trust in your covenants. All can be well and *will* be well if you build on true gospel principles.

We all struggle with health problems occasionally—others do so constantly. Illness and disease are part of the burden of mortality. Have faith and be positive. The power of the priesthood is real, and there is so much that is good in life, even if we struggle physically. It is a joy to know that there will be no injury or disease in the Resurrection.

Some of our concerns may come in the form of temptations. Others may be difficult decisions pertaining to education or career or money or marriage. Whatever your burden is, you will find the strength you need in Christ. Jesus Christ is Alpha and Omega, literally the beginning and the end. He is with us from start to finish, and as such is more than a spectator in our lives. There is hope in the testimony of Paul;

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet [was] without sin. [Hebrews 4:15]

If the yoke under which we struggle is sin itself, the message is the same. Christ knows the full weight of our sins, for he carried it first. If our burden is not sin nor temptation, but illness or poverty or rejection, it’s the same. He knows. Alma saw his day, and testified:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; . . . he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people . . .

And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities. [Alma 7:11–12]

He suffered so much more than our sins. He whom Isaiah called the “man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3; Mosiah 14:3) knows perfectly every problem through which we pass because he chose to bear the full weight of all our troubles and our pains. Why? “That [he] may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12).

Brothers and sisters, you have and will have worries and challenges of many kinds, but embrace life joyfully and full of faith. Study the scriptures regularly. Pray fervently. Obey the voice of the Spirit and the prophets. Do all that you can to help others. You will find great happiness in such a course. Some glorious day all your worries will be tuned to joys.

As Joseph Smith wrote to the struggling Saints from his cell in Liberty Jail:

Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed. [D&C 123:17; emphasis added]

Fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail . . .

Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.

Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet; be faithful, keep my commandments, and ye shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. [D&C 6:34–37]

I know that God is our Father, and that we are his spirit offspring. I know that Jesus Christ is his Son, the Redeemer of the world; that he came in the meridian of time to provide the example of perfect love and to perform the ultimate sacrifice. I know that he rose from the tomb on the third day with a resurrected, perfect body of flesh and bone, and that he appeared to his prophet Joseph Smith. I know that this is his Church, and it is led today by his prophet, Ezra Taft Benson.

I know that, as Nephi says, God “loveth his children,” and “He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world” (1 Nephi 11:17; 2 Nephi 26:24). May those words of Nephi help you to worry less and enjoy life more, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.