

# *What It Means to Establish a Relationship with Christ*

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Thank you, President Oaks. I appreciate the opportunity to be here with you today, and I, too, enjoyed the music very much. It does set quite a pattern for us today. As I greet you on this occasion, it is with a feeling of great responsibility and awe. Today we have a new baby daughter at our house. That is my wife's other assignment and the reason she could not be here today. That baby daughter, Amy, has caused a great deal of reflection to occur in my life, and I'd like to talk with you about part of that reflection. It relates to establishing a relationship with Christ.

On that early morning when this infant was born, I had the privilege of being in the delivery room. I waited in anticipation—in anxiety, really as into my mind flooded all the experiences that I thought my wife would be going through: her concern, her anguish, her excitement, and yet her awareness that she would have to wait upon the Lord. It would come in his time. And it did.

When that beautiful, perfect infant was placed upon its mother's breast, into my heart came a great and wonderful feeling, and yet a feeling of deep concern that I do not know that I have felt before. As I saw that little infant, into my mind came the thought: "Look there. A real person." Sounds strange, doesn't it? Of

course an infant is a real person, but I could not just see her as an infant. I saw her as a grown individual, one of distinct personality, one who had great potential and was sent here to the earth to realize that potential; and now a great part of the responsibility to help her reach that potential rested upon me, as she rested upon her mother. I pictured in my mind four other beautiful baby daughters—now growing into lovely womanhood. I could see the lovely lady Amy can become, and I contemplated the great potential that promises blessings even beyond her experiences and growth here on the earth.

What is this potential that Amy has? What is there ahead for her, and what is my responsibility to her? Well, I thought, she is a daughter of our Heavenly Father, one who, having just come from his presence, may return again to our Heavenly Father and there reside in joy and happiness eternally. She is one who can qualify and prepare herself for her own eternal family of which she will always be a part, and

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need never be alone; she can be one who is a worthy companion to an eternal mate who holds the priesthood and who therefore can care for her spiritual needs as well as provide for the physical needs that she has. She has within her the power to become whatever she desires to become. Yes, this is her potential. The responsibility, then, that rests upon me is the responsibility to teach her and to help her know what powerful potential she has. I must help her to remain beautifully pure, and to become the best Amy that she can become on this earth and throughout all eternity.

As I gave solemn thought to that, I realized that I must do all I can to help her develop a close relationship with Christ very early in her life—actually, to help her retain that relationship, for I felt her closeness to him as she entered this life. Now that thought is on my mind as I meet with you and as I feel a responsibility to you. Each of us has that same responsibility and capability to develop a personal, warm, and loving understanding with the Savior—our Savior, the One who came here to the earth that you and I might have the privilege of realizing our greatest potential. With that in mind, I should like to talk with you about what it means to have a personal relationship with Christ. To illustrate this, let me give you some examples.

In my office I have some great experiences. I have people come by who are there to change their lives. As I discuss this matter with them, almost always I can ask them the question, “Well, what makes it different now? Why do you want to change now?” And almost always they will say something like, “I believe I now have somewhat of a vision of what I can be, of who I really am.” Then it begins.

Such was the case with a young man just two weeks ago. He came in; he was tall, he was dark, he was a nice-looking man, and as I looked at him I thought, “Here’s someone who could be without troubles.” He looked happy, he appeared strong and well kept, and he

looked like he had the confidence of a man who knew where he was going. I asked him, “Will you please tell me about your life?” He did. He told me that he was a convert to the Church of just six years. He was twenty-three years of age. His introduction to the Church had come about after a life of some trouble and turmoil, but he met a special young lady—you know how that is; it changes your whole life, doesn’t it? Well, that is what happened to him. He met a young lady who had some standards that he had not been keeping himself but which he admired. The more he came to know her, the more he realized that the reason he so admired her was that she held to these standards of morality, of good conscience, of industry and concern. And the more he realized why he admired her, the more he wanted to find out about her source of strength. She told him that her source of strength was the gospel of Jesus Christ as taught in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He began to listen, and he began to change his life. He joined the Church.

After he had joined the Church, she left the town in which they lived and came to Brigham Young University. He decided that if she were going to come here he ought to, too, and so he followed. When he arrived here, he said he thought, “Oh, boy! Look at the field!” He could hardly believe what he saw. “I could see that I could date any one of thousands of young ladies and be perfectly safe.”

“Now, what do you mean, safe?” I asked.

“Well,” he said, “the young ladies I had been dating before were not safe for me to be with. Their standards were not what they should be and did not help me. Oh, how delighted I was to enter BYU!”

Well, for the first half of the semester his hopes and dreams were realized, and then he met a young lady on this campus who was seemingly a strong member of the Church. On the first date, though, he discovered that she was much like girls he had known before, and he found himself slipping, sliding, falling, until

he had reverted to an earlier immoral behavior. He said, “Brother Pinegar, I couldn’t believe it; I couldn’t understand it. I thought everyone at BYU held to the standards of the gospel—why didn’t she? I felt I would be protected from my former self. Doesn’t everyone at BYU have the relationship with Christ that this first girl I knew had?”

“You’ll have to answer that,” I replied.

“Well,” he said, “I discovered that I could find on the campus what evil I was looking for, and so I left the campus to protect myself. I returned home. It took me two years before I felt strong enough to come back to Brigham Young University.”

I commented, “That’s really an indictment against a great and marvelous student body.”

“Oh, don’t get me wrong. I understand that they’re not all the way this girl was, but,” he said, “I had expected more.” Then he said something that I felt was very profound. “I expected my strength to come from others. I began to realize that if anyone was going to help me it would have to be myself. If I expected anyone to have a relationship with Christ that protected me from the sins of the world, it would have to be me. I discovered there were those on the BYU campus who could help me become strong and help me develop a personal relationship with Christ, such a relationship as would bring me strength of testimony, power of decision, and firmness of commitment.” He developed such a relationship here at BYU, and that was why he was in my office. He said, “I feel now that I am prepared; I am ready to go on a mission, if the Lord will have me.” Well, after our discussion and prayerful consideration, it was my feeling, even my knowledge, that the Lord would have him; and today he is awaiting his call.

I would call your attention to a scripture—1 John 3. If you have your scriptures with you, I would like you to turn to that and read it with me, if you will. Here John describes for us who we really are, and what in very deed

our relationship with the Christ and with our Heavenly Father is. When I read the scriptures, I like to read them for myself, because I believe that they were written for me, and so as I read them I put my name in them—as the one to be instructed, not the one giving the instruction. Join with me as we read from 1 John 3:1–3 this is John speaking to Rex.

*Behold, [Rex,] what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore [, Rex,] the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*

*Beloved [Rex], now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be [, Rex]; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

*And [Rex,] every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he [or Christ] is pure.*

What a marvelous description of our relationship with Christ! To think that we shall see him as he really is—the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world—and then we shall see ourselves purified even as he is pure. We shall see ourselves as being related to him as his brothers, as his sisters, as his family. Will it not be wonderful, then, to realize our relationship with our Heavenly Father, to recognize our relationship to him as his children? Knowing this, we can develop a better relationship with him now.

I believe prayer to be of key importance. Knowing that we really are his offspring should affect how we pray, should help us to understand that when we speak with our Heavenly Father in prayer he really is our Father. I can tell you from my personal experience that realizing our true relationship to our Heavenly Father has changed my life significantly. I have come to realize that I can actually have a conversation with my Heavenly Father. As I kneel in prayer, in private, there are two of us there. I am not alone but am there with

someone who really cares, with someone who knows my innermost feelings and thoughts. Not only does he know, and not only does he care, but he can do something about it. He is the one whose power is so great that he can arrange for me to receive instruction that will lead me into paths that will lead me away from evil and toward happiness right now. I do not know of anything that brings more happiness than to realize that what we have done or are doing is correct and right. Such is the desire of our Heavenly Father, to provide us with that kind of instruction, and so he has provided for us a messenger, a messenger from his own home, even the Holy Ghost; and that messenger can speak to our souls, to our minds, and enlighten us with truth so that we may be able to make judgments which are correct in every situation.

As I say that, I realize that you're often in situations where you would like to know the truth and you'd like to know the answers to questions. Some of the questions are difficult to answer. Most of those questions relate to, "What's going to happen to me? What will I become? When will I find an eternal companion? And what will he be like? What will she be like?" Those questions really can be turned inward: "Can I qualify to be an eternal companion? What am I going to do about myself?" Then make the decision to do it, the decision to change from what you are to what you really ought to be. Prayer provides the key to such important decisions. Through prayer and your personal relationship with Christ, you will be enabled to make decisions that are correct, decisions in which you can have confidence, decisions which will bring you to a realization of your greatest potential.

I would like to share another story. This is about a young man whose name was Jack. He had a desire and was worthy to serve a mission, which he did properly and well. All the time he was gone he wrote to a beautiful young lady. She waited for him, and when he

returned he found her even more beautiful than when he left her. Because of her good looks and talent, she had a successful job with a performing group which rehearsed on Sundays. It was a job that also required that she wear a rather revealing costume. He was disappointed and concerned. He expressed his feelings to her, expecting that she would quit this job and seek for one that would not compromise the gospel standards. She felt he was asking too much. After all, she was mature and she could make up her own mind, make her own decisions. She wanted him to understand that what she was doing was important to her. He said, "Well, that's true; but if you decide to remain where you are, you've made a decision that we're through."

She did not believe him. He did not believe she would stay. She continued, and he meant it, and soon they parted. He began searching for someone else.

He found someone here at BYU and they began dating. He enjoyed her company and she lived the standards he believed in. Yet somehow he could not get the feeling that she was the one for him, that she should be his eternal companion. But this young man had developed a special relationship with the Lord. He went to him in prayer. He talked it over with the Lord and said, "I've decided not to date this girl any longer. Help me to know if this decision is right." He said he felt the answer to his prayer was that his decision was wrong. Well, he thought, I didn't think she was the one, but the Lord must feel differently.

Several nights later, however, Jack found out how the Lord had been working with him. As they returned from a date, the girl discovered that she had left her key inside and could not open her apartment door. She sent him to the apartment next door for help. He knocked and a young lady came to the door. Her hair was in curlers, her face scrubbed clean. He asked her if he could borrow her activity card. She thought that was an unusual request until

he explained he needed it to unlock a door. (Still a rather unusual reason!) As he walked back to where his date waited, he studied the activity card. (Maybe he was curious to know how she looked when her hair was not in curlers.) Something he saw prompted him to say—after unlocking his date’s door and saying goodnight—“That’s alright; I’ll return the activity card to Melanie.” He thought it was the only polite thing to do. Soon he was introducing himself to Melanie and asking her where she worked. The next day and for the next several days he appeared at her place of work. He seemed to have a lot of business of that kind to accomplish! Finally, in order to keep him from coming to her work, she agreed to go with him on a date. And so they began dating, and he discovered that he had found the one. He had found the one who had the same commitment to the gospel, the same relationship with Christ that he himself had decided to have. He learned that she had been waiting for the right one also. Because they had made the right decision and because of their relationship with Christ, they found each other. Today those two are happily married.

An example of how the Lord brings happiness into people’s lives is shown in an experience which he had at the well. You’ll recall that there was a woman at the well drawing water. He wanted a drink and asked for one, and she wanted to know what he had to do with a woman of Samaria, he being a Jew. But he discussed a few things with her, and through that discussion she discovered that he really knew who she was, and she wanted him to tell her the truths he offered about this well of living water that could grow up within her.

He said, “Well, I’ll tell you, but first go get your husband.” He knew that you don’t teach a woman without teaching her husband the truths of the gospel.

She answered, “But I have no husband,” and he responded, “Yes, I see that. You’ve had

five husbands, and the man you’re living with now is not your husband.”

She recognized right away that this was a man different from anyone she had ever met before, and exclaimed, “Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.” And she was correct; he was the Christ. So impressed was she with the respect that he gave her that she went into the village and gathered thousands of people to come out to listen to the Savior, this Christ, this man who had told her all she had ever done. They came and he taught, and a renewal of the commitment came into her life—a testimony was born. (see John 4:7–30, 39–42).

The Savior had a way of meeting with the people and improving their lives. He honored them by his mere presence and by his attention to them. I suppose that one of the reasons he was so effective was that he was a good listener. He is still a good listener and will hear the pleadings of our soul if we desire to develop our relationship with him.

A young man went to his mission president not too long ago and confessed to him some things which he had done prior to going on a mission. He was repentant. He desired to change his life. He asked the mission president to forgive him for lying to him in an interview. He said, “Do you think I can ever make this thing straight?”

The mission president put his arm around the young man and told him, “We’ll try. Let’s work at it.”

And so they did. They contacted the proper priesthood authorities and asked them for their forgiveness and contacted the other people who were involved and received from them a forgiveness. Then it was up to the Lord. The young man went before the Lord, and the answer he received was, “Work. Thrust in your sickle with all your soul. Prove thyself.” The young man was so elated that he would be able to remain in the mission field and that he had this opportunity to repent that he labored with all his might.

What a great contribution that young man has made on his mission and continues to make with his life! Why? Because someone listened. The Lord listened to the pleadings of his soul. Forgiveness is part of the character of Christ and as we repent it becomes an important part of our relationship with him.

In the 64th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, beginning with verse eight, the Lord teaches us the importance of forgiveness in our lives. He tells us how important it is for our own welfare that we forgive others. In describing this characteristic of forgiveness, the Savior spoke of those disciples who had been with him while he dwelt in the flesh and this is what he said:

*My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil [, Rex,] they were afflicted and sorely chastened.*

*Wherefore, [Rex,] I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.*

*I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, [Rex,] but of you it is required to forgive all men.*

*And ye ought to say in your hearts, [Rex,]—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds. [D&C 64:8–11]*

The Savior, in teaching us this principle of forgiveness, has taught the very purpose of his mission on the earth. He came that you and I might be forgiven through repentance and through diligent and faithful efforts. He came because he forgave. Even on the cross he said, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). I believe that most of us, if not all, could honestly say that about others who offend us—“they know not what they do.” Then let us forgive them and forgive all others who might offend us, and then we

shall develop an even closer relationship with Christ; and in that relationship we shall repent and qualify for the forgiveness of our Heavenly Father and draw nearer to him. Such a relationship will enable us to experience the joy of seeing Christ as he really is and ourselves as we truly are—joint heirs to our Father’s Kingdom—and that relationship can be an eternal, joy-filled association with Christ and our Heavenly Father.

Let us review some important principles for Amy, and for each of us to follow if we are to develop this relationship with Christ which will enable us to realize our greatest potential:

First, we must recognize that our Heavenly Father is the literal father of our spirits, making us his children. This principle enables us to grasp the vision of our potential.

Second, through the principle of prayer we develop a relationship with Christ who serves as our mediator with the Father. Effective use of prayer leads us to correct decisions on our journey toward our potential.

Third, living the twin principles of repentance and forgiveness enables us to retain the Spirit and the companionship of the Holy Ghost. Thus we are led in truth toward our greatest potential.

Fourth, the companion principles of hearing, listening, and doing are essential elements of our lives. Just as Christ listens to our Heavenly Father and then obediently does the will of our Father, so we learn to listen and obey. We demonstrate these Christlike attributes by our service to others. Such service places us in the service of our God and therefore takes us toward our greatest potential.

Our greatest potential is to become like Christ—worthy, exalted, loving, faithful children of our Father in Heaven. May each of us develop a relationship with our Savior which will enable us to realize that potential. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.