

# *Practicality of Gospel Principles*

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**I**t is a privilege to be with you at Brigham Young University today. I am grateful for this opportunity. As I return to this campus, the wonderful and far-reaching influence of BYU on our family fills my mind. That influence began before I was born when a young woman from Monroe, Utah, Exilda Nielson, enrolled at Brigham Young University and graduated in the class of 1932. She would later be the mother of my sweetheart, Bonnie, who attended BYU for one year. Bonnie was ready to begin her sophomore year when I asked her to marry me, and she willingly sacrificed further formal education so that I could begin my college studies that year. In fact, she paid the tuition for my second term! She has not returned to these hallowed halls as a student, but she has nurtured the whole of her family here.

She bore two beautiful children while I completed my bachelor's degree in elementary education. She endured the next four years while I taught school in California and completed a master's degree at San Francisco State College. During that time period we were blessed with two more wonderful children.

Over the next three years she supported me with love and encouragement while I completed work for a doctorate in educational psychology at the University of Southern

California. After completion of my doctorate and 13 years of university studies, I accepted a full-time teaching position in the College of Education here at Brigham Young University.

For me and my family, it was an honor and a privilege to associate for six years with the faculty and students of this great institution. I left BYU when I was called into full-time Church service.

Since that time our six children have attended BYU and have graduated with degrees in humanities, interior design, business, English, and education. Our son and his wife and a son-in-law have law degrees from BYU's J. Reuben Clark Law School. Two sons-in-law have master's degrees from the Marriott School of Management. Our youngest daughter, Amy, graduated this past April with a degree in humanities. Next semester our oldest granddaughter will begin her first semester here—and thus our family's fourth generation—at this great university. You can see that Brigham Young

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University has had and will continue to have a marked influence for good in our family.

My heart is filled with gratitude to the Lord for all that His gospel and His church have brought into my life and the life of my family. I am grateful that under the inspiration of heaven, Brigham Young caused that this institution should be established. With gospel truths serving as the foundation for all learning and teaching at Brigham Young University, how great is the advantage to those who teach and study here.

On the first day of this month we celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of Brigham Young—prophet and president of the Church for 30 years. Last week, in a celebration held in Brigham Young’s honor in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, President Gordon B. Hinckley paid tribute to him as “the greatest entrepreneur this country has produced.” He said, “No one of whom I know was engaged in such a wide variety of undertakings.”

In a video about Brigham Young, Utah historian Dean May stated that there is no “parallel to Brigham Young in the history of the settlement of the American West” (see “Brigham’s Profound Faith,” *Church News*, 9 June 2001, 16).

Harold J. Sheptstone, an English historian, wrote of Brigham Young:

*Brigham Young dug canals, imported plants, and animals, built railways and telegraphs; established industries and banks, constructed theatres and universities; and encouraged literature, music, and art. . . . He planned and erected temples and tabernacles, still used by his people today; they are the wonder of modern architects. He was the founder of a hundred cities and settlements and the Governor of one of the territories of the United States. [In Emerson Roy West, *Profiles of the Presidents* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 80]*

President Hinckley pointed out that “while all of this was going on, he never lost sight of

his greater mission. He was prophet, seer, and revelator to his people.”

Today it seems appropriate to say a few words about Brigham Young the educator. Here was a man who received only 11 days of formal education (see *The Presidents of the Church*, ed. Leonard Arrington [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986], 44), yet became a leader of education and the founder of two great universities: Brigham Young University and the University of Utah.

He often spoke about the importance of education. In a conference of the Church in 1859, he said these words: “This is our labour, our business, and our calling—to grow in grace and in knowledge from day to day and from year to year” (*JD* 6:268). He urged the people to promote schools and to study and counseled school teachers to “introduce every kind of useful studies into our schools” (*JD* 12:32, misnumbered as page 407).

Brigham Young believed that a sound, practical education was a necessary requirement for preparation not only for one’s life’s work but also for service to the Lord. He said every minute of every day of our lives we should strive to improve our minds. He established a school in his home for his children and then later built a schoolhouse close to the home where the children were taught the basics of education as well as manners of conduct. Following elementary education his children were encouraged and assisted in furthering their knowledge and skills in their chosen fields of study.

Brigham Young lived by the words he taught:

*We are the guardians of our children; their training and education are committed to our care, and if we do not ourselves pursue a course which will save them from the influence of evil, when we are weighed in the balance we shall be found wanting. [In Dean C. Jessee, *Letters of Brigham Young**

to His Sons (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), introduction, xxix]

Much of his greatness as a prophet and leader and father was in his practical approach to life and to education. He taught that the gospel is to be our guide for daily living. He felt and taught that “the religion of Jesus Christ is a matter-of-fact religion, and taketh hold of the every-day duties and realities of this life” (JD 11:133).

Although he encouraged learning and education in “every kind of useful studies,” he stressed that it is vital for us to learn and live by the teachings of Jesus Christ.

He felt that the spiritual and temporal aspects of the gospel are as one in the mind of God. He taught:

*If I am in the line of my duty, I am doing the will of God, whether I am preaching, praying, laboring with my hands for an honorable support; whether I am in the field, mechanic's shop, or following mercantile business, or wherever duty calls, I am serving God as much in one place as another; and so it is with all, each in his place, turn and time.* [JD 13:260]

Brigham Young's vision of education for his family and for members of the Church is practical for us in our “place, turn and time.” During this demanding time of educational studies and pursuits, it is good for us to be reminded of the practical teachings of the gospel and their place as priorities in our lives.

I would like to focus on just a few of those practical teachings that I shall call the “simple things.”

Prayer is one principle and privilege that may be so simple an act that we fail to recognize its power and importance in our lives.

We sing in a hymn, “Prayer is the simplest form of speech / That infant lips can try” (“Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire,” *Hymns*,

1985, no. 145). The smallest child can learn to pray daily and to recognize the guidance and blessings of a loving Heavenly Father.

Recently our 11-year-old grandson Clark was trying with all his energies and effort to get the lawn mower started so that he could complete the task of having the lawn mowed before his father returned from meeting me at the airport. Clark is a dutiful boy and wanted to please his father and his grandfather by having the lawn looking its best. Finally, after many frustrating moments of trying without success to get the mower started, he went to the telephone to call his mother, who was at a rehearsal at the church. She was there to preview a pageant that was being prepared for their stake youth conference and had been listening to words of scripture and testimony of prophets of the Book of Mormon from member-actors who were portraying Nephi, Alma, Helaman, and a mother of a stripling warrior.

Therefore, when Clark asked his mother what he should do, her first thought was to say: “Pray about it!”

Clark's first thought was “Pray about starting a lawn mower!?” But, “stripling warrior” that he is, he didn't doubt his mother, and he didn't doubt the Lord. He thought, “Well, God created this whole world! Of course He can start a lawn mower!” He knew when he went back to try again the lawn mower would start. And it did, with very little effort from Clark. Then Clark prayed again, this time to say “Thank you.” This simple faith of a young boy brought an answer to his earnest prayer when he needed help.

Brigham Young said:

*Were I to draw a distinction in all the duties that are required of the children of men, from first to last, I would place first and foremost the duty of seeking unto the Lord our God until we open the path of communication from heaven to earth—from God to our own souls.* [JD 8:339]

To one of his sons who was attending a university in New York, Brigham Young wrote:

*As you advance in life you will find every position and occupation surrounded by its peculiar temptations, the great strength and bulwark against all of which is prayer to our Heavenly Father. Cultivate this spirit and you will find that it shall be a wall of fire around you, and your glory in the midst of you. In its practice you will find a safeguard against the wiles of the adversary, and every good resolution will be fortified by it, and every seductive influence will lose its power to annoy you.* [In Jesse, *Letters*, introduction, xxxv]

To the members of the Church, Brigham Young admonished, “Ask him to put you just where he wants you, and to tell you what he wants you to do, and feel that you are on hand to do it” (*JD* 6:43).

Of all the wealth of information available to you as students of this university and out of the great amount of knowledge that you are trying to gain, can there be anything more important for you to know than the will of God for you—where He wants you to be and what He wants you to do?

He has provided you with a way to know. He has given to you—to all of us—the simple but powerful principle and privilege of prayer.

In October 2000 general conference, President Hinckley gave us this instruction:

*There is no other resource to compare with prayer. To think that each of us may approach our Father in Heaven, who is the great God of the universe, for individual help and guidance, for strength and faith, is a miracle in and of itself. We come to Him by invitation. Let us not shun the opportunity which He has afforded us.* [Gordon B. Hinckley, “Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children,” November 2000, 53]

President Hinckley has further expressed the need for us to seek more diligently to obtain the Spirit of the Lord and let it be the governing influence in our lives.

Seeking to know the will of our Father in Heaven through prayer and desiring strength to do His will draws Him near to us. This practice brings us to a unity with Him of direction and purpose. He has made it easy for us to communicate with Him. He has given us a pattern for prayer and has made Himself always available to us. He has told us to “pray often,” to “pray continually,” and to have a prayer in our heart always so that we might not be led into temptation.

Although the act of praying is simple, answers to prayers are not always that simple to recognize. However, the Lord has given us a means of identifying His answers.

Remember His words to Oliver Cowdery:

*Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. . . .*

*Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation.*  
[D&C 8:2–3]

When He brings our mind and heart into harmony on the matter about which we are praying, we have experienced the spirit of revelation and therefore have the answers to our prayers.

Most often an answer to prayer comes simply as a feeling of peace. The Lord’s response to Oliver Cowdery was, “Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?” (D&C 6:23).

There are times when we may feel that peace and therefore be certain that we have received an answer to our prayers. We feel inspired to pursue a particular course of action, and then we encounter bumps in our road or obstacles in our way. We may run into a darkness or fog that slows us down

or blocks our view of the desired destination. Doubts or questions may arise concerning the source of our inspiration. We may even feel that the Lord didn't hear our prayers after all or that we are unworthy of the blessing we have asked for. We may even be tempted to turn away from the inspiration we have received or to seek another answer from the Lord—perhaps a different or easier course could be found. We may even become discouraged enough to quit praying.

Brigham Young had some teachings on that subject, too. He said:

*Let no person give up prayer because he has not the spirit of prayer, neither let any earthly circumstance hurry you while in the performance of this important duty. By bowing down before the Lord to ask Him to bless you, you will simply find this result—God will multiply blessings on you temporally and spiritually.* [JD 12:103]

It is important, therefore, for us to continue to pray as the Lord has taught—with real intent and with all the energies of our heart. We must pray for the spirit of peace to be with us and for strength of faith to do what is required for the Spirit to remain with us. Trust in Him and stay the course. Leave the matter in the Lord's hands and have faith in His timetable. We should not counsel the Lord nor try to predict how our prayer should be answered.

Brigham Young said we should keep our "spirit, feelings and conscience like a sheet of blank paper, and let the Spirit and power of God write upon it what he pleases. When he writes I will read; but if I read before he writes, I am very likely to be wrong" (JD 14:79).

Brigham Young also said, "Instead of searching after what the Lord is going to do for us, let us inquire what we can do for ourselves" (JD 9:172).

Answers to some prayers may require fasting—another simple thing we can do to draw nearer to the Lord and one of the few things we can do to give of ourselves to Him. Often answers to our prayers may be found in a simple verse of scripture. It has been said that when we want to talk to the Lord, we pray. When we want Him to talk to us, we read the scriptures.

"And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated" (D&C 130:21).

Obedience in doing the simple things has always been the means of obtaining the greatest blessings of the Lord.

Remember the story of Naaman:

*Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. [2 Kings 5:1]*

At the direction of his king, Naaman went to Elisha the prophet to be healed of his dreaded affliction.

*Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.*

*And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.*

*But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. . . .*

*And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?*

*Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.*  
[2 Kings 5:9–11, 13–14]

Are we not all sometimes like Naaman, looking for big and important things to do and bypassing the simple acts that could improve and heal our lives and bless the lives of others?

Several years ago President Howard W. Hunter gave a devotional address to the students of this university entitled “What Is True Greatness?” He taught that “the achievement of true greatness . . . always requires regular, consistent, small, and sometimes ordinary and mundane steps over a long period of time” (in *BYU 1986–87 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [Provo: BYU, 1987], 115).

President Hunter taught this lesson to me in a very personal way. The first time I met him was when I was called to his office to be set apart for an assignment on a general board. He greeted me very kindly and discussed with me the opportunities I would have as I served in this new calling. He commended me, smiled at me, and then, in his gentle, kind manner, he humbled me by telling me it was not difficult to find people to serve in that assignment. He said if we were to step outside and stop the next 100 members of the Church who passed in front of the Church Administration Building, almost all of them would be able and willing to serve in that same calling.

Then he asked, “Do you know what we need in the Church, Brother Pinegar?” I just sat there, not knowing how to respond, and he didn’t really wait for my answer. “What we need,” he continued, “are home teachers. That is the great need in the Church today.”

As he placed his hands on my head, I was uncertain what Elder Hunter would say. I thought he might set me apart as a home teacher, but in his pleasant, reassuring manner he set me apart and gave me a blessing that

I would be able to fulfill my new calling. I promised myself that I would be a better home teacher.

The calling of a home teacher—and many other callings—may seem small when compared to some leadership positions in the Church, but any calling faithfully fulfilled can be of inestimable value to you and to others.

President Hunter said, “Frequently it is the commonplace tasks that have the greatest positive effect on the lives of others” (“What Is True Greatness?” 115).

As a teenage boy I worked for a building contractor pouring concrete foundations, driveways, and sidewalks for homes. I learned that concrete was made up of a mixture of very simple elements that of themselves were not stable enough for a foundation. But mixed together in proper sequence and proportions, tiny grains of sand, small pebbles, water, and cement powder form a unique substance of unusual strength and durability. For a few hours after the concrete is mixed, it can be poured into any desired form. At first, before it is completely hardened, even a tiny bird hopping across its soft surface will leave an imprint. Later, however, it becomes so firm an elephant could walk over it without leaving any tracks.

Just as a few simple elements combined in a proper way form a sturdy foundation for a house, so do the simple teachings of the gospel bond together to make a strong foundation for our lives.

In contrast, we must be aware that there are small things that can destroy rather than build or strengthen us. For instance, tiny grains of salt sprinkled on concrete, if they are not removed, can actually cause it to break up and crumble. Similarly, small steps taken in the direction of wrongdoing, ignored or uncorrected, will weaken and destroy our lives. Big problems grow out of thinking that little things—wrongs—won’t matter.

President James E. Faust quoted President George Albert Smith when he addressed the

priesthood session in general conference last October:

*If you cross to the devil's side of the line one inch, you are in the tempter's power, and if he is successful, you will not be able to think or even reason properly, because you will have lost the spirit of the Lord.* [George Albert Smith, *Sharing the Gospel with Others*, ed. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 43; quoted in Faust, "The Enemy Within," *Ensign*, November 2000, 45, 46]

Let us choose to do the little things that come to us under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord, and the big things we face will assume their proper perspective in the eternal scope of things.

President David O. McKay also spoke of the positive power of small and simple acts:

*There is no one great thing that we can do to obtain eternal life, and it seems to me that the great lesson to be learned in the world today is to apply in the little acts and duties of life the glorious principles of the Gospel. Let us not think that because some of the things . . . may seem small and trivial, that they are unimportant. Life, after all, is made up of little things. Our life, our being, physically, is made up here of little heart beats. Let that little heart stop beating, and life in this world ceases. The great sun is a mighty force in the universe, but we receive the blessings of his rays because they come to us as little beams, which, taken in the aggregate, fill the whole world with sunlight. The dark night is made pleasant by the glimmer of what seem to be little stars; and so the true Christian life is made up of little Christ-like acts performed this hour, this minute, in the home, in the quorum, in the organization, in the town, wherever our life and acts may be cast.* [David O. McKay, *CR*, October 1914, 87–88]

Elder Hartman Rector, Jr., was a fairly recent convert of the Church when he was called to the First Council of the Seventy. In a conference address in 1994 he taught a simple

message that has had a great impact. He began, "I have found the gospel to be very simple, but also very profound." He observed that after baptism, "it appears that all the Father requires of us is that we endure to the end. . . . I believe it means basically three things. One: . . . repent. . . . Two: . . . forgive others. . . . And three: Yes, we must be nice. If we're not nice, I don't think we're going to make it" (Hartman Rector, Jr., "Endure to the End in Charity," *Ensign*, November 1994, 25, 26).

President Hunter's mother, Nellie, taught her son, a future prophet, "It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice" (in Leonard J. Arrington, Susan Arrington Madsen, Emily Madsen Jones, *Mothers of the Prophets*, rev. ed. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987, 2001], 240).

Being "nice" is part of those "every-day duties and realities" spoken of by Brigham Young. It should come naturally to those who are striving to follow the example and teachings of the Savior. Simple acts of kindness—a kind word, a friendly hello, a thoughtful deed, even a smile—can make a great difference in the life of one who is lonely or troubled or without hope. We may assist the Lord in bringing a blessing or even a miracle by the simple act of being nice.

It is by our good conduct that we demonstrate charity—the true love of Christ. We emulate and honor Him by our willingness to sacrifice personal comfort for the welfare and happiness of another. The Christlike qualities of selflessness, patience, honesty, and integrity are the most valuable assets we can acquire that will bless the lives of others as well as our own and should be demonstrated in all of our associations and endeavors.

In Brigham Young's words:

*I . . . feel to urge upon the Latter-day Saints the necessity of a close application of the principles*

*of the gospel in our lives, conduct and words and all that we do; and it requires the whole man, the whole life to be devoted to improvement in order to come to knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. Herein is the fullness of perfection.*  
[JD 12:255–56]

Through living these simple principles, you and I will find great blessings of enlightenment, enabling us to make a greater contribution of good in the lives of others. And we

will learn, as Brigham Young declared, that “the religion of Jesus Christ is a matter-of-fact religion” that influences every duty and reality of life (JD 11:133).

I bear witness of Jesus Christ, that He lives, that His gospel deserves our very best effort in its application in our lives. Put the simple things first so that your other studies will be seen in their proper light. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.