

The Talent of Spirituality

HARTMAN RECTOR, JR.

Good morning, my young brothers and sisters. It is always a humbling experience to come to this building, where great attendance is always in evidence—particularly at basketball games. You are always an inspirational sight. I think you scare opposing teams to death, which is to our advantage. But I feel strongly the spirit that emanates from this institution.

I bring with me a couple of quotes from President McKay which seems appropriate. He said to a group one time, as he arose to speak, “You are so good; you really should be a lot better than you are.” And to another group he said, “You’re so good that I hesitate to say anything to you, and yet still so far from perfect that I feel I must say something.”

Here you are at this great University—and I like to feel that it is the Lord’s university—developing your talents and your abilities. You are certainly the gifted generation. The technological advances and mechanical developments that are so commonplace today almost boggle the mind. One must be well trained to make his way in the world today; and that is what you are here to learn. You must make maximum use of your capabilities, your talents, and your opportunities just to keep pace. This you are doing, and I commend you for it.

It is great that you are acquiring an education, but in all of this getting and acquiring there is a danger that you will neglect the most important talent that you can develop on this earth. In the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, the greatest talent that you will develop upon this earth will be the talent of spirituality. This may come as a new idea to you. Perhaps you do not consider spirituality a talent, and yet it is precisely that. Why is it so important that this be developed? Because it will be the means of achieving everything in this life that is really worthwhile.

Another quote from President McKay expresses this thought well; he said:

Every noble impulse, every unselfish expression of love, every brave suffering for the right; every surrender of self to something higher than self; every loyalty to an ideal; every unselfish devotion to principle; every helpfulness to humanity; every act of self-control; every fine courage of the soul, undefeated by pretense or policy; every being, doing, and

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living of good for the very good's sake—that is spirituality. [David O. McKay, *True to the Faith*, compiled by Llewelyn R. McKay (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 245]

Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, discoursed at some length on the importance of spirituality. He began with a shopping list of what spirituality is not, and he entitled the lack of spirituality “the works of the flesh.” These are his words:

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. . . .

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance [or fussing and quarreling], emulations [meaning the unrighteous ambition to excel at all costs], wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings [which means disorderly merrymaking], and such like [that is not the whole list, but that is part of it]: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. . . .

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. [Galatians 5:16–17, 19–23, 25–26]

He continues,

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. [Galatians 6:7–8]

Life everlasting could be interpreted as eternal life, which, of course, is the greatest gift of God (see D&C 14:7). “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God:” said Paul, “for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Brother McConkie’s statement takes on more sharp and pointed meaning the further we go. Obviously there is a great need for us, one and all, to develop and hold on to the talent of spirituality. How do we do it? I have listed eleven steps that we can follow. I am sure that there are more, but these will give us a beginning; and we may not finish, with the time restraint that we have, but we can stop anyplace. However, we cannot ever stop working on spirituality.

The first is prayer—“the simplest form of speech That infant lips can try” (“Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire,” *Hymns*, no. 220). Man has always been commanded to pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, because this is our communication line with God. There is another, just as real as God, who tells us *not* to pray. He says things like, “It won’t be necessary this time,” or “There isn’t time to pray this morning.” Have you ever heard that? Or, “Isn’t one prayer today enough?”

Nephi’s words on the subject are very pointed:

For the evil spirit teaches not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray.

But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy

performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.
[2 Nephi 32:8–9]

Enos adds the words which the Lord spoke to him, “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it” (Enos 15). The Lord seldom if ever gives before we ask. He frequently gives more than we ask or more than we expect. The old Jewish proverb seems to state the case very succinctly; it says: “Before there is a stirring above, there must be a stirring beneath.”

The second principle is fasting—going without food or drink so that the senses are sharpened, the mind is alert, and humility is deepened. Awareness of our total reliance on God is a great boon to understanding and experiencing things of the Spirit. The Master fasted for forty days after his baptism. Moses fasted for forty days in the mountain before he received the commandments written by the finger of the Lord. I am not recommending forty days or five days or even two days in succession, but I am recommending twelve days a year and perhaps an additional day here and there as the Spirit directs. There is a special power that comes to the spirit through fasting. I notice how it always affects my children on fast day; as the blessing on the food is said, they really mean it!

The third factor is attendance at church. The question is asked, “Do you have to go to church to serve God? Can’t you worship God on the golf course?” The answer: “Sure, you can worship God on the golf course six days a week, but on the Lord’s day he indicates that he would have us pray to him and attend church.” These are his words in the Doctrine and Covenants:

That thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day;

For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High;

Nevertheless thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days and at all times;

But remember that on this, the Lord’s day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord.

And on this day thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart that thy fasting may be perfect, or, in other words, that thy joy may be full.

Verily, this is fasting and prayer, or in other words, rejoicing and prayer.

And inasmuch as ye do these things with thanksgiving, with cheerful hearts and countenances, not with much laughter, for this is sin, but with a glad heart and a cheerful countenance—

Verily I say, that inasmuch as ye do this, the fulness of the earth is yours. [D&C 59:9–16]

What a promise for those that attend church! President Kimball has also added in our own day and time something to bring us up to date when he says, “No Sunday buying.”

Fourth is the payment of tithing. This is the Lord’s law of financial management with success guaranteed. “Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” The Lord has never promised his faithful tithe payers that they will be independently wealthy, but he has promised them that they will have sufficient for their needs, and he also says that he “will rebuke the devourer for [their] sakes.” The devourer means the devil, Lucifer, Old Scratch, or whatever name you may like. So you also receive special protection from the devil, which is a blessing of tremendous proportions. As a matter of fact, if we do not pay tithing, which is one-tenth of our annual interest—and *interest* is interpreted to mean *income*—according to the prophet

Malachi we are thieves and robbers (see Malachi 3:8, 18, 11). Spirituality cannot flourish in a dishonest atmosphere.

The fifth factor for increasing spirituality is obedience to the Word of Wisdom—abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, and drugs. We do not know all the reasons why we have the Word of Wisdom; certainly there are evil deigns which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days. Television is replete with these enticements; it makes them look awfully good. No doubt we would be deceived if it were not for what the Lord has told us.

President McKay made a statement on the Word of Wisdom that I think is very important. He defined the qualities that made the Lord Jesus Christ the perfect man as truth, justice, wisdom, benevolence, and self-control; and then he said this about self-control:

*One of the most practical teachings of the Church regarding this principle is the Word of Wisdom. . . . Daily practice in keeping this commandment will do more in the development of true moral manhood than anything else I know. It is true. It deals principally with the appetite; but you show me a man who has complete control over his appetite, who can resist all temptations to indulge in [stimulants, liquor, tobacco, marijuana, and other vicious drugs] and I will show you a man who has likewise developed power to control his passions and desires. [David O. McKay, *Treasures of Life*, compiled by Clare Middlemiss (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1965), p. 457]*

A person who indulges his appetite either secretly or otherwise has a manhood or womanhood that will not serve him when he is tempted to indulge his passions. That is an interesting statement, and it is true. Judging from the interviews I have conducted over the past eleven years with people who have violated the laws of chastity, I believe that there is a strong connection between abstinence from

alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, and drugs and the ability to control passions and desires.

The sixth point is study of the scriptures. No one will ever by truly spiritual who does not understand or is not conversant with the scriptures. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” said Paul to Timothy,

and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. [2 Timothy 3:16–17]

The word of the Lord is sharper than a two-edged sword (see Hebrews 4:12).

Alma found the word of God to be powerful, as is recorded: “And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient they should try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5). We recommend the virtue of the word of God. You will be spiritually attuned as you become conversant with the word, and it should become part of your conversation. The word of the Lord will give you words to speak and thoughts to express; and as they speak, those who really have the spirit sound almost as though they were quoting scripture.

Seventh, we should use no profanity. Watch your words. “The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). Paul’s counsel to Timothy, recorded in the fourth chapter of 1 Timothy, verse twelve, was thus: “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

King Benjamin offers a similar warning in Mosiah, the fourth chapter, verses twenty-nine and thirty, when he says that the ways to

commit sin are so many and so diverse that he cannot tell us about all of them.

But this much [he says] I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.

It is vitally important that we keep our words clean. You cannot keep the Spirit of the Lord and take his name in vain.

Factor number eight is to speak no ill. Paul's admonition to Timothy to be an example for believers in conversation is, I believe, the key to enjoying the Spirit daily. You cannot speak evil of your brother—and this is particularly true of the Lord's anointed—and still enjoy the Spirit of the Lord. Gossip turns off the Spirit every time. Of course, off-color stories and jokes are completely forbidden. You do not have to participate in these things; it is not necessary. As a matter of fact, your vocabulary increases tremendously when you use clean words. I know it does.

Point number nine is purity of thought and action, which means that pornography of all kinds is off limits—no playboy- or penthouse-type magazines, no R, X, Y, Z, or even some PG-rated movies. Pornography is everywhere. You will find your relationship with the Holy Ghost to be the tenderest relationship that you will ever enjoy. I guess that the Holy Ghost has the tenderest feelings of anyone with whom you will ever associate. If you just think the wrong thought, he is gone, and he does not come back until you clean it up. To court the Spirit, you must keep your thoughts clean.

Point number ten is simply to be sweet. No one likes a frowny face—there is a song about that, I think. Smile and the world smiles with you. In developing real spirituality you cannot be a sourpuss, because you have to be a

blessing to people; they must enjoy your presence. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. Be happy, and you will find that it works miracles with everybody around you. And you really ought to smile even when you do not feel like it, because you become as you act. Do you sing because you are happy, or are you happy because you sing? If you are unhappy, try an experiment: start singing. I guarantee that you will not be unhappy very long. We become as we act.

Principle number eleven is sacrifice, which means that instead of endlessly doing what you want to do you must do what the Lord wants you to do. Sacrifice can mean one thing to one person and something completely different to someone else, but sacrifice is required of everyone who would have the Spirit of the Lord.

Brother Featherstone recounted an interesting story about Orson Spencer and his wife, Katherine. In the mid-1830s, the Prophet Joseph Smith sent missionaries back to Boston, Massachusetts. When they arrived, they started meeting with a man by the name of Orson Spencer; he believed and was converted. His fiancée was taught at the same time. They wanted to get married, and they both wanted to join the Church; so they went to her family to see if they could get permission. The interview did not last very long; Katherine's father told her, "If you choose to marry Orson and if you join this Church you are no longer welcome in our home. We never want to see you again. We disown you. We disinherit you." That was about the summary of the interview. As they left this interview, Katherine said, "Well, Orson, I only know one thing—I want to marry you and will do whatever you say."

So they joined the Church. They were married, and they had five children back in Massachusetts. But Katherine was a frail little girl, and I guess that having five children rather close together was really too much for her. Her health was not good. They decided

that they ought to move to the west with the rest of the Saints, and so they made their way to Nauvoo, Illinois; no sooner did they arrive there than Brother Brigham gave the word that they were going to move on westward.

Brother Orson was concerned; he felt that his wife would never be able to make this kind of a trip. In desperation, he wrote back to her family and he said, in essence, "Please let Katherine come home to be nursed back to health. She has been sick; I despair for her life. I don't believe she will make it across the plains. We are going to leave soon. Please let me know." Then he added these words, "I will do anything that you ask."

The weeks passed and it became a month, and it was time to leave. They fixed a little pallet for a bed and put it in the wagon, and they began to roll westward. It was in the middle of the winter, as you know, and the going was very difficult. At night the roads froze hard as granite; but when the sun came out in the morning the roads became a quagmire, and the wheels were up to their axles in mud many times. They could only make a few yards an hour. Finally, about eighteen days out, they made an encirclement, and into the camp rode Porter Rockwell. He had picked up mail, and he distributed it around the camp. He gave Orson a letter written by Katherine's parents.

He read the letter, "Yes, we would love to have our daughter come home. We'd love to see her again, but only on the condition that she leave you and leave her newfound Church. Then we will nurse her back to health. We would love to see her again, but only on these conditions. If not, we never want to see her again. We disown her. We disinherit her, and she is not welcome in our home." Orson, feeling terrible, climbed into the wagon and gave the letter to Katherine. She read it; she had not known until then that he had written it. He said, "I told them that I would do anything. And this is their answer."

She asked, "Orson, would you hand me the Bible?" He did. She opened to a particular scripture; you will find it in Ruth, the first chapter, verse sixteen. She handed it back to Orson and said, "Would you read this, please?"

He read, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

"No, Orson," she said, "I won't leave you."

He sat by her a while. They held hands and shared a tender moment. And then he touched her pallid face as she closed her eyes, never to open them again in mortality. The next morning they held a brief service beside a shallow grave, with nothing but the lowing of cattle as music. Then Orson climbed up onto the covered wagon and prepared to roll westward. His oldest daughter came and climbed up beside him. Her name was Aurelia Spencer Rogers; she was to become the founder of the Primary.

I love Sister Aurelia Rogers for what she did. It has affected my family, and it will affect my family's family. It came as a result of sacrifice. But even more, I love Katherine, because it was her sacrifice that really made it possible. You see, sacrifice does bring forth the blessings of heaven, and I am convinced that sacrifice is absolutely necessary if one is to develop true spirituality. It may seem at the time to cost dearly, but in the end the Lord restores it all in full measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over.

Obviously, this was not the only sacrifice that has been made to bring the gospel to where it is today. Almost every convert makes a similar sacrifice to come out of the world and up into the marvelous light of Christ; and this comes about because of the Spirit which is shed forth on those who are just and true and who keep the commandments of God. As I said a moment ago, there may be many more things that the Lord will ask you to do, but he will not ask you to do anything that you cannot do; and

you will be the better for having done what he asks.

The Lord's promises are sure; they never fail. "He never doth vary from that which he hath said" (Mosiah 2:22). And he says that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the hearts of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" and keep his commandments (1 Corinthians 2:9). I bear witness to you that God does live; that he hears and answers prayers; that he knows each one of us so well that he could call us by first name. I bear witness that Jesus is the Christ and that he came to break the bands of death, to show us how to live and how to walk that we might walk in the light. I bear witness

that his is the only name given under heaven and among men whereby we must be saved. It is Christ or nothing.

I bear witness to you that this is God's true Church and that he has reestablished it upon earth through this great prophet, Joseph Smith. And I bear witness that we have a living prophet today—he is Spencer W. Kimball, a prophet of the living God whom the Lord is preserving to guide the Church in this day and time for our benefit. I bear this witness to you in all soberness, and leave you my love and my blessing and my fond affection and pray that you can develop the greatest talent that you will ever achieve in this life, even the talent of spirituality. I do this in Jesus' name. Amen.