

To the Lonely and Misunderstood

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I do not know those for whom this message is specifically intended or to what portion of those present it directly applies. I am confident, however, that if I am supported by your faith and prayers as it is delivered so that I can give expression to the deep feelings of my heart, this message will be of significant benefit to some who need it, provided they apply consistently in their lives the principles emphasized. I do not say this with any degree of personal pride, but in humble recognition of the experience I have had in its preparation. Seldom have I struggled as long and as hard to crystallize the feelings of my heart as I have on this occasion. But finally those sweet, quiet promptings of the Spirit came, which give me confidence to speak with conviction and assurance to those among us who are struggling with feelings of inadequacy or of being left out or of being misunderstood or not appreciated.

Some Encounter Difficulties

Each passing day I am aware that there are many youth of the Church who understand the teachings of the Savior and apply them faithfully and consistently in their lives. They continue to grow in strength and self-confidence and find their obedience is rewarded with happiness, peace, and self-

assurance. I am also aware that there are significant numbers of youth who are striving to identify a path that will bring them satisfaction—a sense of belonging and of self-worth. Some have an intellectual knowledge of gospel principles but have not incorporated them completely into their own lives. They live partially or superficially the teachings of the Savior and, as a consequence, do not receive the fullness of direction that can come from the Lord or the ability to achieve blessings that result from being fully, willingly obedient to His commandments. They have not yet discovered the power and inspiration that come from the Lord to aid all of us in the difficult experiences of life. Such individuals strive mightily to face each day's challenges on their own, and they encounter difficulties. It is because I now know that they see only a part of the picture and can be stealthily led by Satan down erroneous paths, that, with deep love and empathy and with all the conviction of my soul, I wish to

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share some personal experiences which a kind and loving Lord has used to help me understand the meaning and power of some of the principles of His gospel.

I too have had such feelings of loneliness and of being left out and not appreciated.

My Life and Learning

I was born into a home where my father was not a member of the church, and my mother was what today some would categorize as inactive. During my early childhood, I did not in any way understand the significance of the fact that there was no priesthood-bearing patriarch or consistent teaching of pure gospel principles in our home. Yet no son could have loved more or been more proud of my father than was I then and am now. He taught his five boys by noble example the importance of industry, integrity, education, manual skills, trust, and obedience. We gained self-confidence through the practice of these worthy traits. Because he traveled frequently and left our precious mother alone for significant periods of time to raise five active, exuberant boys, we discovered in her an amazingly marvelous combination of love, patience, firmness, and diligence. She was and continues to be more a friend and companion than anything else. (I should add the Lord has since greatly blessed our family. Dad is currently a sealer in the Washington Temple, and mother serves with him as a temple worker. Both provide powerful examples of righteous obedience for each of us.)

During my youth, through kind, understanding bishops and patient home teachers and other interested members, the five boys were encouraged to attend Church and to participate in its activities. We did so, although at times reluctantly. I remember with sadness the times when at separation for Sunday School classes, I would slip out the back door to walk in the park. There were, however, times when I listened to the teachings in class. I'm sure that, if anyone would have questioned my testimony

and understanding of the gospel, I would have fiercely defended it as being strong and vigorous. Only from the perspective of time and the marvelous experiences of later, more active participation in the Church, do I now realize that I knew very, very little of the true meaning of the gospel plan. I participated in Church activities but somehow felt I was always at the periphery. I would approach Mutual activities daydreaming of a glorious evening dancing with the most popular girls in the ward. The reality of each evening was quite different. As I sat on the sidelines and watched others enjoying themselves, I felt somehow left out, not part of the central group. The same thing occurred in school. Though I felt comfortable in the academic activities, the social and sport activities left me feeling alone and unwanted. It was not until a lot later in life that I realized it was largely my fault.

I have since learned that one cannot demand love and respect or require that the bonds of friendship and appreciation be extended as an unearned right. These blessings must be earned. They come from personal merit. Sincere concern for others, selfless service and worthy example qualify one for such respect. All my rationalization that others had formed select groups and knowingly ruled out my participation was largely a figment of my imagination. Had I practiced correct principles, I need not have felt alone.

Well did President McKay repeatedly observe, "Every man, every person radiates what he or she is. Every person is a recipient of radiation" ("*The Times Call for Courageous Youth and True Manhood*," *Improvement Era*, June 1969, p. 116). Where proper gospel principles are observed, that radiation invites friendship and trust. Where they are lacking, there is a negative unpleasant radiation that closes the doors to righteous companionship.

During my last year at the university, I looked forward to the prospects of a fine professional future and had my life very well

outlined. Then a kind and thoughtful Lord placed a bombshell in my little world. Her name was Jeanene Watkins. Her father's call to the senate brought her to Washington, D.C., where I lived. The more I knew her, the more fascinated I became, and each opportunity to be with her deepened the growing love within my heart. One evening as we conversed about the important things of life, she innocently said, "When I marry, I'll marry in the temple, a returned missionary." That comment struck me to the core. It began a process of reflection, contemplation, and prayer that resulted in my receiving a call as a missionary to Uruguay.

I thought myself ill prepared to teach the gospel to anyone. I had an intellectual understanding of some of the gospel principles that I recognized needed to be converted into a heart-centered, Holy-Ghost-inspired, burning testimony of truth. I struggled to communicate to the Lord my feelings of gratitude for the privilege of service, of the blessing of righteous parents, and for the love of one of His most precious handmaidens. I asked Him to help me become an effective servant in His hands. I strained to forget self, struggled to help others, and in the process, the skeleton of the teachings I had received took on the flesh and blood of new life and meaning.

I discovered that we are not left alone to face the challenges of life, but can receive guidance and strength from a loving, understanding God in heaven. I bathed my pillow with tears of pleading for the mercy of the Lord to forgive a wayward soul or to fortify a family in need—and found my own needs met. I pleaded that a heart could be softened or a struggling father could be given a personal witness of truth—and discovered the limitless breadth of love.

Familiar scriptures, through prayer and application, guided me to new depths of understanding and appreciation. I had read the words many times. They now took on new meaning—

And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all . . .

But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him. [Moroni 7:45–47]

What a priceless message for any who would enjoy the comforting circle of true friendship. How I wanted then, as I do now, to share those exquisite feelings of love and appreciation—of belonging.

There were then, as now, constantly new lessons. Well do I remember the first time, when, as I pleaded with the Lord in solemn prayer for the help and guidance and feeling of support I had come to cherish, there was no answer. Rather I felt a barrier—an insurmountable wall. I reviewed my life, my feelings, my acts, and all that could affect such communication and found no problems. It was not until after much more purposeful struggling that there came the clarification. What I had felt was not a wall but a giant step, an opportunity to rise to a higher spiritual plane—an opportunity evidencing trust that I would obey correct principles without the necessity of constant reinforcement. After more effort, the peaceful, comforting presence of the Spirit returned.

Four Principles

I wish I had some magic wand that would allow me to touch the hearts of each for whom this message is intended and communicate the experiences that have flowed from a loving Father since that time, but I cannot. I can,

however, mention four principles that I have come to recognize as the foundation of happiness and growth and the secure feeling of companionship with the Lord.

These four principles have brought the deepest feelings of worthwhileness, peace, and happiness into my own life. The Lord has established these cornerstones in His eternal plan, and each one is essential. All work together in harmony and reinforce one another and, when they are applied with diligence and consistency, produce strength of character and increasing ability to convert the challenges of life into stepping-stones to happiness now and forever. They are—

- Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His program
- Repentance to rectify the consequences of mistakes of omission or commission
- Obedience to the commandments of the Lord to provide strength and direction in our lives.
- Selfless service to enrich our daily existence

Satan also knows that these principles, if observed consistently, will render an individual increasingly resistant to his temptations. He has developed a comprehensive plan to undermine or destroy each one of them. For example, to dispose of faith, Satan would plant and cultivate in each one of us the seeds of selfishness, for he knows that, if left unchecked, they will grow into a monster that can consume and destroy the divine spirit in man. Selfishness is at the root of sin. It reinforces destructive habits that produce a dependence on chemical or physical stimulants that destroy the mind and body. Selfishness leads to unrighteous acts that debauch and deprave the soul.

Satan's program is based on immediate gratification of selfish desires. Participate now and pay later—yet the full, terrible consequences of payment are never revealed until it is tragically late.

The Spirit of the Lord can over power the stifling effect of selfishness. That Spirit comes with faith, repentance, obedience, and service.

Genius of the Gospel Plan

With the other brethren, I have the privilege of interviewing youth who have stumbled along the way and yet have painstakingly found their way back. Many are anxious to serve a mission. Their backgrounds vary widely, as does the degree of their transgression. Support from others ranges from strong to nonexistent. Yet there is always a common thread of similarity. In every case, without exception, each has come to the realization that wickedness never was happiness. Each has resolved to place into effect the saving principles of the gospel. The proper use of free agency produces the miracle of rebuilt, useful lives. I have personally verified that, until words like *faith*, *prayer*, *love*, and *humility* become a living part of us through personal experience and the sweet prompting of the Holy Spirit, they hold no great significance and produce no miracles. I found that I could learn gospel teachings intellectually and through the power of reason and analysis, recognizing that they were of significant value. But their enormous power and strength and ability to stretch one beyond the limits of his imagination did not become reality until patient, consistent practice allowed the Holy Spirit to distill and expand their meaning in my heart. The genius of the gospel plan is that by doing, principally in selfless service to others, those things the Lord counsels us to do, we are given every understanding, every capacity, every capability necessary to provide rich fulfillment in this life and the preparation necessary for eternal happiness in the presence of the Lord.

Yet anyone that paints a picture of life as being easy, without challenge, is either not being honest or has not yet encountered the growing experiences which the Lord gives each of His children to prepare them for happiness in this life and the blessing of dwelling eternally in His presence. The purpose of these experiences has been clarified by the Lord:

And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. [Ether 12:27]

Elder Orson F. Whitney wrote:

No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven.

We can, however, avoid unnecessary sorrow and distress. President Tanner has wisely counseled:

The first thing to remember is that if we really understand and live the principles of the gospel, we won't find ourselves in some of the predicaments we get into. Much of the loneliness, heartache and despair which is common to so many people, have come because either they or someone in their family or their mate did not live the principles of the gospel, or did not apply the principle of repentance.

That is the second thing to remember. If you do get into trouble, or have not kept the commandments and have transgressed, then we have this glorious principle of repentance to help us erase the guilt and start all over again. The Doctrine and Covenants tells us, "By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them." [D&C 58:43]

The Drain of Worry

Some of us divert our best efforts from constructive accomplishment by investing them in mental anguish and continual worry. The Lord has taught me a great lesson about worry that I would like to share with you today. After a wonderful full-time mission, where everything that has subsequently proven to be of eternal value in my life began to mature, I was sealed in the temple to my lovely Jeanene. She had fulfilled her mission while I was serving mine. We began our life together with every expectation of happiness, having some understanding of the application of the principles of the gospel in our lives. I was blessed, I'm convinced, through the kindness of the Lord to obtain a job in a new, highly developmental pioneer effort to place a nuclear plant in a submarine. The work was fascinating, challenging, and absorbing. When combined with the natural growth experiences that come with the formation of a new family unit and Church assignments, I found each day fully occupied.

Within eight months, I was in the office of a doctor being carefully examined to determine if I had ulcers. For weeks each night I would return home from work with a severe headache, and only after a long, quiet period of isolation could I calm my nerves sufficiently to sleep briefly and return to work the next day. I began to prayerfully consider my plight. It was ridiculous. All I wanted to do was to be a worthy husband and father and carry out honorably my Church and professional assignments. My best efforts produced frustration, worry, and illness. In time, I was prompted to divide mentally and physically, where possible, all of the challenges and tasks and assignments given to me into two categories: First, those for which I had some ability to control and to resolve, I put into a mental basket called "concern." Second, all the rest of the things that were either brought to me or I imagined I had the responsibility to carry out, but over which I had no control, I put in a basket called "worry." I realized I

could not change them to any significant degree, so I studiously strove to completely forget them. The items in the “concern” basket were ordered in priority. I conscientiously tried to resolve them to the best of my ability. I realized that I could not always fulfill all of them on schedule or to the degree of competence I desired, but I did my conscientious best.

Occasionally as I sat in my office, I’d feel my stomach muscles tighten and tension overcome me. I would cease whatever activity I was engaged in and with earnest prayer for support, concentrate on relaxing and overcoming the barrier that worry produced in my life. Over a period of time, those efforts were blessed by the Lord. I again came to understand how the Lord is willing to strengthen, fortify, guide, and direct every phase of life. The symptoms of illness passed, and I learned to face tasks under pressure.

Worthy Accomplishment=Success

Why is there such emphasis in the world today on things? When things become an end unto themselves—the object of our effort, not tools to be used to reach greater more noble goals—they become part of Satan’s plan to deflect us from the Lord’s program. They can lead us carefully down to hell. Things do not produce happiness on earth nor do they provide exaltation. Material things are to be respected for their value as tools. Every artist, surgeon, or writer needs tools. They become instruments for greater good and should not at any time be the ultimate goal of life.

Much of life’s disappointment comes from looking beyond the mark, from seeking success and happiness where it cannot be found. When wealth, position, influence, and power become measures of success in life, we should not be disappointed when their attainment does not produce the satisfaction and blessings promised for fulfillment of the commandments of the Lord.

The Savior declared as His work and glory “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). He enthroned love for one another, service to a neighbor, and building the kingdom of God for His glory and majesty as noble worthy goals that produce rewards beyond all power of expression.

Mormon gave us precious insight when he declared:

For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.

But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.” [Moroni 7:16–17]

I have obtained a personal witness that the true monument to an individual is worthy accomplishment, not mounds of paper plans or hoards of accumulated possessions. The eternal progress we attain in our own life and our contributions to that progress in the lives of others are measure enough of the worthwhileness of our efforts here on earth. No matter who we are, what lofty position we hold, or what powerful influence we wield, these things in and of themselves are of no lasting moment. Of real worth is how well we serve as instruments in the hands of the Lord to accomplish his divine will or how devotedly we obey His commandments and worthily receive His ordinances. In the final analysis, all our success can be measured by how effectively we can interpret and accomplish the will of our Father in Heaven in our own lives, the lives of our own family and

loved ones, and the lives of His other children we are blessed to serve.

Conclusion

It has been a distinct honor to have been in your presence today, and I'm not sure how many present benefited from the comments made. I ask, if they apply to someone you know, that you will share them. Once in my life, I had the feelings of being left out. I now share the companionship of incomparable brotherhood and sisterhood, a feeling of belonging, of being useful, and I recognize that it comes only from sincere striving to live the commandments of the Lord. There are those

about us on every side who would justify taking a path contrary to that of the Lord because they feel rejected. Oh, how essential it is to touch such a heart and have it feel the expanding influence of the Holy Ghost and to show to such an individual how every problem of life can be corrected when the gospel is allowed to flow into one's life.

May God bless each of us to appreciate our heritage, the privilege of attending this glorious university, the great honor of being children of our Father in Heaven with testimonies of truth. May we share it with those in need, I humbly pray in Jesus' name. Amen.