

Seekers of Truth

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Brothers and sisters, it is wonderful to be with you this morning. You are a beautiful sight. Each time I come on campus, I can't help but think of many years ago when I came for a stake conference here with one of the BYU student stakes. We spent the evening with the stake president and his family and had a wonderful dinner. During the evening we visited, and the stake president asked Sister Snow, Phyllis, about serving with me. She said, "Oh, it's very enjoyable." She said she loved coming. The only thing that bothered her, she said, was that "I am often introduced as his lovely wife." He made note of that. The next morning we were in the Provo Tabernacle with all of these students—coeds and young men. President Roney stood up to introduce us. He said, "We would like to welcome Elder Snow and his lov . . ." And he stopped. Then he said, "I would like to welcome Elder Snow and his drop-dead gorgeous wife."

And I still feel the same. I think he got it. So I am grateful that she could be here this morning.

Now I know many of you come each year for this important week, and I applaud you for your desire to pursue learning. You who are here for the first time, I hope you find this week of learning stimulating and rewarding.

I made the attempt to learn a little bit more about the history of Campus Education Week. So of course I googled "BYU education week" and learned that this has gone on since 1922 and that it is one of the largest continuing education efforts in the world. I thought that was remarkable. And if we had more time, knowing many of you come year after year, I would see who has come the most times, who is the oldest participant, and who has come the farthest. I think that would be fun. But we don't have that time this morning, so I will continue my remarks.

My thoughts today address our responsibility to be seekers of truth. The inspiration for what I will say comes from the theme of this year's Campus Education Week, Doctrine and Covenants 88:118: "Seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith." I hope to address our responsibility to learn and

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teach one another and to identify opportunities to do both.

For the past several months the eyes of the world have been on the small country of South Africa, which hosted the World Cup, the largest sporting event on the planet. Every four years for the past 80 years, countries of the world have competed for the World Cup, the most prestigious of all sporting championships. The level of interest in soccer—or football, as it is known outside of the United States—is at an all-time high. Even here in the United States, where past interest in the World Cup has been rather marginal, soccer madness was at a fever pitch as the U.S. advanced to the top 16 international teams. It seemed like all those soccer kids that we raised grew up and became rabid fans.

This was the first time the competition had been held on the African continent, and South Africa was honored with the right to host the competition. This is an amazing honor for a country that less than 20 years ago teetered on the brink of civil war. South Africa is a country that until 16 years ago did not allow the majority of its citizens the right to vote. In a country of 48 million, the predominantly white government denied 38 million blacks the opportunity to go to the polls and cast a vote. How does a country once known as an international pariah and banned from worldwide sport competition in such a short time earn the right to host one of sport's most prestigious competitions?

The story of this amazing transformation features two important individuals who have left their mark on modern history. The first is F. W. de Klerk, former president of South Africa, who was elected from the National Party, a political party that had perpetuated apartheid, the policy of separation of the races, since they came to power in 1948. He had the foresight to understand the continuation of such policies could not be sustained and would ultimately lead his country into further isolation internationally and likely result in a

bloody civil war. De Klerk had the courage to face those in his party who disagreed and set in place negotiations that led to free elections in 1994. He also had the courage to release Nelson Mandela and lift the ban on Mandela's political party, the African National Congress.

Nelson Mandela is the other important individual in this fascinating drama. An early political activist, he campaigned for political reforms in his country in the 1940s and 1950s and into the early 1960s. Initially, he followed Gandhi's model of nonviolent resistance. However, as the years of struggle passed with no meaningful progress with the white government, his rhetoric turned more strident as he eventually concluded change would not come without armed resistance.

Ultimately this stance ended in his arrest and trial for treason, which culminated in his conviction in 1963. Narrowly avoiding the death penalty, Mandela spent the next 27 years in prison. Much of this time was spent in a small cell in a prison on Robben Island, a small island located in Table Bay near Cape Town, South Africa. I have stood in the tiny cell where Mandela spent so many years. In this cell, the floor and a mat were his bed, and a bucket served as the toilet. I visited the limestone quarry where he and other prisoners were forced to labor in the hot African sun. He was allowed few visitors and was allowed to receive and write few letters. I wondered then and I marvel now on how one could survive such an experience.

One would understand if Nelson Mandela, convicted by a government he despised, was full of hate and vengeance. But that was not the case. As an inmate he taught his fellow prisoners tolerance and understanding. He turned the direst of circumstances into an opportunity—petitioning prison officials for educational opportunities and organizing classes and correspondence courses for those political activists who were imprisoned with him on Robben Island. "We will make this prison

our university,” he told his fellow inmates. For the better part of 20 years, Mandela had a profound influence on all those who entered through the prison doors and provided opportunities for a generation of political activists to prepare to lead their country when freedom came. At one time a proponent of violence, Nelson Mandela would later say on a visit to the United States, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (quoted in Peter J. Howe and Diane E. Lewis, “Mandela and Boston Embrace in a Daylong Celebration of Unity,” *Boston Globe*, 24 June 1990, 1).

After 27 years, freedom came for Nelson Mandela when he was freed by President F. W. de Klerk. He then led the opposition in negotiations with the government that brought about free elections. It was in this election in 1994 that Nelson Mandela was elected as South Africa’s first black president. Attitudes of forgiveness and reconciliation were the hallmarks of his leadership as president. He brought his country together and led them back from the brink of what could have been years of armed conflict. He was instrumental in forming the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which has become a model for the entire world for overcoming past wrongs and prejudices. This example of leadership took root in those long years of confinement when he chose learning and understanding over hatred and fear.

In March of 1886, Elder Lorenzo Snow, then 71 years of age and a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, became the most prominent LDS leader to be incarcerated for the practice of plural marriage. He entered the Utah Territorial Prison in Sugar House, Utah, convicted under the federal anti-polygamy Edmunds Act, which was passed in 1882. For those persecuting the Mormon people for their religious practices and beliefs, this was considered a great victory.

Lorenzo Snow joined the Church in 1836 in Kirtland, Ohio, along with his sister Eliza R.

Snow. As an early member of the Church he served missions in Ohio, Illinois, and Kentucky before beginning extensive missionary service in Great Britain. Brother Snow arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1848, and in 1849 he was called as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. After returning from additional missionary service in Europe, Elder Snow was called to preside in Box Elder County. Eventually he settled his large family in Brigham City, where he happily remained until he became president of the Church in 1898.

This peaceful period was interrupted in November 1885 when he was arrested for the practice of plural marriage. A non-Mormon jury convicted him, and he was sentenced in January to 18 months in prison.

While awaiting sentencing, Elder Snow spoke to a group of Saints in Brigham City:

I go to prison with the full assurance that I can serve God and His purposes — magnify my calling, and prove to the world, my faith and sincerity in the principles I have taught, during fifty years, among many nations — that Jesus is the Son of God — that He has revealed His Priesthood, and the fulness of the ancient Gospel, and established His Church by revelation. . . .

. . . In a few days I must leave family, kind friends and associates with whom I have spent so many pleasant hours in “The City I love so well” — proceed to Ogden — receive my sentence, then retire to private life, within my prison walls, for “The word of God and testimony of Jesus.” [JD 26:365–66, 368]

It would be easy to understand if Elder Snow entered prison embittered and resentful of a government that convicted him for practicing his religious beliefs. Certainly a natural reaction would be to withdraw and suffer in silence the long months of incarceration that lay ahead. This was not to be the case with Elder Snow. Accepting his lot, he immediately went about helping his fellow prisoners. He

organized classes in reading, writing, math, and bookkeeping. One prisoner recorded:

Some six weeks ago Apostle Snow, feeling a deepening interest in the school, kindly volunteered to give two lectures a week on grammar. A class of fifteen members was organized and has since been under his kind and able tutelage and it has brought new life into the study and his lectures are looked forward to with the warmest interest. His able, kind, and genial manners have found way into the hearts of the entire school. [H. T. B. Grey, in "The Penitentiary School," Utah Journal, 14 July 1886, 1]

Rudger Clawson, a fellow Mormon polygamist convicted in 1884, said this about his time of incarceration with Lorenzo Snow:

He was considered an excellent authority on doctrinal points, and his views were frequently sought; as we sat around the table during the long hours of the evening, he often discoursed interestingly upon matters pertaining to the past, present, and future conditions of man. I shall ever look back to those hours—hours passed in prison—as among the most profitable of my life. [Prisoner for Polygamy: The Memoirs and Letters of Rudger Clawson at the Utah Territorial Penitentiary, 1884–87, ed. Stan Larson (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1993), 128]

Elder Lorenzo Snow is another example of someone turning an impossible situation into an environment of learning and faith, replacing fear and hatred. He lived the words of the Lord included in the Doctrine and Covenants and adopted as the theme for this Campus Education Week:

And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. [D&C 88:118]

Such individuals teach us that even in impossible circumstances we have a responsibility to educate ourselves and to teach others. Lorenzo Snow and Nelson Mandela are not the only ones who have learned and taught under trying conditions.

Most biblical scholars agree that Paul probably wrote many of his epistles while incarcerated for his beliefs. The books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy are often referred to as the prison letters.

During his imprisonment in Liberty Jail the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote many letters to his family and to the Saints. Extracts from a long letter written in March of 1839 later became sections 121 through 123 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Section 121 begins with the plaintive cry from the Prophet, "O God, where art thou?" The Lord comforts Joseph by saying:

My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes. [D&C 121:7–8]

Then, as if to make a further point, the Lord instructed the Prophet in section 122:

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he? [D&C 122:7–8]

Then comes the great lesson to the Prophet Joseph and to us all: "Therefore, fear not what

man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever" (D&C 122:9).

Sometimes life's greatest lessons come to us at the most dreadful times of our lives. How we respond at such times of crisis determines if such challenges will be times for progression or merely times of suffering. The Apostle Erastus Snow taught:

The various pains and sorrows to be endured in life are all necessary in their time and place; the trials as we term them . . . are all a part of the scheme of education or training to prepare us for the future. [JD 21:25]

In late February of 1834, the Prophet Joseph Smith was inspired to organize a group of brethren to travel to Missouri to assist the Saints who were being severely persecuted for their religious beliefs. This group, which became known as Zion's Camp, was to resist the unlawful mobs that were harassing members of the Church and help restore the Saints to their lands, which had been unlawfully taken from them.

Zion's Camp, a group of over 200 brethren and a few women and children, left Ohio in early May of 1834. Led by the Prophet Joseph, they marched a thousand miles in 45 days, finally arriving in Clay County, Missouri.

From the start the expedition was fraught with suffering and hardship. Some members of the group murmured against the Prophet and questioned his ability to lead. The majority, however, remained true to his counsel and continued on.

Zion's Camp did not achieve its political or military objectives. Having been met by a superior force of Missourian ruffians, the Prophet Joseph resisted the bloodshed that would have certainly come from armed conflict. In early July, Zion's Camp was disbanded and its members were honorably discharged.

Later the Prophet explained the outcome and purpose of the march:

God did not want you to fight. He could not organize His kingdom with twelve men to open the Gospel door to the nations of the earth, and with seventy men under their direction to follow in their tracks, unless He took them from a body of men who had offered their lives, and who had made as great a sacrifice as did Abraham. [HC 2:182, note†]

Wilford Woodruff, a member of Zion's Camp and fourth president of the Church, said:

We gained an experience that we never could have gained in any other way. We had the privilege of beholding the face of the prophet, and we had the privilege of travelling a thousand miles with him, and seeing the workings of the Spirit of God with him, and the revelations of Jesus Christ unto him and the fulfilment of those revelations. [JD 13:158]

Within a few months after the discharge of Zion's Camp, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the First Quorum of the Seventy were organized. Seventy-nine of the 82 positions filled in these quorums were filled by those who had served and been proven in the march of Zion's Camp. Men like Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Wilford Woodruff, and many other members of Zion's Camp were strengthened spiritually and gained practical experience that would be of great assistance to them in the future as they were called to lead the Saints west.

Just as with those who faithfully endured the hardships of Zion's Camp, the Lord expects us to learn and progress during this mortal experience. Sometimes our learning comes from our everyday experiences. It is important we learn from these experiences, even those that seem mundane. Much of the success in life comes from simply showing up, working hard, and paying attention. Invariably what we learn in school or on the job can assist us later, sometimes in circumstances we do not expect.

Clearly our time here on earth can be a rich time of learning, simply by taking advantage

of and learning from these experiences. Sometimes life can be a cruel and difficult teacher as we learn through trials and challenges we do not expect and do not welcome. But as we have learned from the lives of those discussed today, those are the lessons that are often emblazoned in our souls, never to be forgotten.

But the “school of hard knocks,” or life’s experiences, will not teach us all we need to know to return to the presence of the Father. The Lord does not desire we simply be acted upon in order to learn. We are taught to seek wisdom from the scriptures, to build our faith through study and prayer, to seek and rely upon the Holy Spirit, to serve others, and to endure to the end.

Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants speaks to our responsibilities to be seekers of truth. In verses 77 through 78 the Lord commands us to “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom . . . in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God.” President Harold B. Lee said, “He [the Lord] counsels as to the wide sweep of learning about which we should seek. His church was not to be an ignorant ministry in various fields of secular learning” (*Stand Ye in Holy Places* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974], 358).

Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms—

That ye may be prepared in all things. [D&C 88:79–80]

That’s a pretty exhaustive list. When you think of the cumulative knowledge in the world and realize what some experts believe, that all of that knowledge doubles every five years, then the Lord has given us no small

charge. Needless to say, He does not expect us to know everything, but He does expect us to know something. He expects us to have some understanding of history, to be aware of current events, and to understand the marvels of His creation that surround us every day. He expects us to pay attention and to learn so we may be prepared to better serve Him.

In this same revelation the Lord goes on to address others who may not have faith:

And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. [D&C 88:118]

What does it mean to seek learning by faith? In the prophet Alma’s wonderful chapter on faith in the Book of Mormon we learn valuable insights on what it means to learn by faith. According to President Harold B. Lee, Alma instructs us to

arouse [our] faculties and experiment on the words of the Lord and desire to believe. Let this desire work in you until you believe in a manner that you can give place even to a portion of the word of the Lord. Then, like a planted seed, it must be cultivated and not resist the Spirit of the Lord, which is that which lighteneth everyone born into the world. You can then begin to feel within yourselves that it must be good, for it enlarges your soul and enlightens your understanding and, like the fruit of the tree in Lehi’s vision, it becomes delicious to the taste. (See Alma 32.)

*It was an English novelist who was quoted as saying: “He who seeks God has already found Him.” [Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye*, 358; see also Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1670), no. 553]*

This process in the Book of Mormon described by President Harold B. Lee in his book *Stand Ye in Holy Places* applies not only to us as individuals as we expand our spiritual knowledge; it is the same process we use to

help others whose faith may not be as strong as ours. You see, the scriptural charge is to “teach one another.” Expanding our own knowledge is not enough. We have been commanded to teach our family, friends, and neighbors in the gospel as well as share the gospel with friends and neighbors, even strangers, who may not be of our faith.

Let me suggest some ways we come closer to achieving this scriptural mandate to be seekers of truth.

First, never stop learning. You alone are responsible for your spiritual growth and accumulation of worldly knowledge. The prophets of old and those of today constantly remind us of the importance of reading and studying God’s word in the holy scriptures. Such study is essential for our spiritual growth. If you do not now have a study program, set reasonable, attainable goals regarding your study of the standard works. Enhance your spiritual growth through prayer, service, regular church attendance, and service in a calling.

But the Lord does not want us to only study the scriptures. In section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord seems to be telling us to study history, science, foreign lands, current events, even political science, among other things. He also tells us to study these things out of the best books. The Lord does not want the members of His Church to be ignorant and uninformed. We have a responsibility to know what is going on in our world. We cannot be experts in all things, but an expanded general knowledge will help us to be better parents, citizens, teachers, and members of the Church. Develop habits that will help you seek wisdom from the best books or from your Kindle, iPad, or laptop. Be aware of current events and seek to understand what is happening in our world. Seek to understand all points of view and do not let your opinions be influenced by those talking heads in the media whose shrill rhetoric reinforces divisiveness and fear. Rise above such things, be a bit more objective in your

thinking and your judgments, and, above all, move forward with faith, for as the Lord told the Prophet Joseph in Liberty Jail: “Fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever” (D&C 122:9).

Second, take opportunities to teach your children. John captured the feelings of all parents when he said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:4). In order to help our children grow up in righteousness, prophets of this dispensation have counseled us to pray with our children, hold family home evenings, study the gospel together, and have wholesome family activities.

The spiritual growth of our children is directly dependent on our efforts to teach them truth and to stand as an example to them. Occasionally we as parents are rewarded for our efforts when we see in them the beginnings of spiritual growth and development. Such was the case years ago with one of our boys when I took my three young sons fishing. Those of you who have had this experience understand that taking small boys out fishing can be quite a project. Young boys are impatient. They often wish to check their hooks to see if they have a fish. In their haste, their fishing lines often become entangled with each other. Patience certainly is a not a virtue of the very young. We arrived very early at a lake near our home in southern Utah and immediately began fishing. We fished all morning with all of the challenges I have recited. I was beginning to wonder if there were any fish in the reservoir, as we had not even had a bite all morning long. It was late in the morning when I realized my five-year-old was missing. I walked back into the tree line near the shore and soon found him behind a large ponderosa pine, kneeling in fervent prayer. I quietly withdrew and returned to the shore. After a few minutes he rejoined his brothers and me.

“Where have you been, Riley?” I asked.

“I’ve been praying, Dad,” he responded. “I prayed I would catch a fish.”

I started to explain to him that perhaps Heavenly Father really didn’t care if we caught a fish that morning, but he went on: “I promised Heavenly Father if I could catch a fish, I’d never do drugs!”

Remember, he was five years old. Now I was worried. I started to pray at that point. We caught just one fish that day. I don’t think I need to tell you who caught the fish. It was the little five-year-old. And, honestly, it really wasn’t much of a fish, but it was the best-looking fish I have ever seen. I am grateful for a loving Heavenly Father who could take a moment out of a very busy schedule to answer the fervent prayer of a five-year-old. But I was perhaps even more grateful for a young son who was beginning to learn the importance of going to his Heavenly Father for answers to things that were very important to him. You see, I wasn’t always going to be with Riley, but his Heavenly Father will always be there to provide answers and to help him through the difficult times. Now he has three young sons of his own, and they do things together. And it is wonderful to observe.

The Lord has commanded us to “bring up [our] children in light and truth” (D&C 93:40). Much of that responsibility lies in their spiritual growth and development, but we also have the duty to teach them to become responsible citizens and parents. We do our children no favors by neglecting their secular education and development. We must encourage them in their school studies and provide a quiet place where they can study and complete their homework assignments. We must take an interest in their schooling and do our best to support and strengthen our local schools. Reading aloud to our children from the best children’s books is a wonderful way to spark their curiosity and stimulate their desire to learn.

Dinnertime can be a wonderful opportunity to conduct discussions on matters of local or

world interest. This provides an example and an opportunity for our children to learn and be motivated to learn more. Well-informed, well-educated children are more likely to grow up successful in their own homes and careers. This success then provides opportunities for them to give meaningful service to others in the Church and in their communities.

Third, participate in class discussions in Sunday School, priesthood, Relief Society, and other gospel study settings. Read the lessons beforehand and come prepared to share your insights in the class discussion. Participation in a gospel-teaching setting provides added opportunities for the Holy Ghost to act upon those in attendance (see D&C 50:14–22). The Holy Ghost, you see, enhances and quickens learning (see D&C 33:16). The Spirit comes in greater abundance when class members come prepared to act, not just to be acted upon. By participating in class discussions we fulfill the charge in the Doctrine and Covenants to “teach one another.” A question or comment expressed during a class discussion can many times be more effective than the most well-prepared gospel lecture. We cannot afford to come to gospel classes simply expecting to be entertained. Real learning occurs if we come prepared and then participate in the gospel discussion.

In conclusion, pay attention to your life experiences, not just the challenges and trials. While there will be many, and these will be great opportunities to learn, appreciate what is happening in your everyday life. Appreciate the opportunity to learn from what you observe and experience. Develop curiosity about the world and all that is in it. Improve your personal study habits of the gospel, particularly the standard works. Likewise, spend time in searching wisdom from the best books so you might be more aware of this wonderful world and all that is in it.

Remember, we are not in this alone. We have a responsibility to teach our children and

to teach and instruct one another. We cannot accomplish this if we don't invest the time and effort to study, prepare, and then engage with our children and those around us both in and out of the Church.

All of us know of some large family that inadvertently left a child behind after a short stop on a long journey. Perhaps it has happened to you. Most often this occurs because someone forgot to take a count as everyone loaded into the minivan following lunch or a rest stop. Several miles down the freeway the error is discovered, and panicked parents retrace their steps until the little one (by now scarred for life) is found and restored to his mother's arms.

Such was the case two thousand years ago when Mary and Joseph left their home in Nazareth and journeyed to Jerusalem with their kinfolk and acquaintances for the Feast of the Passover. Three days into their return trip from Jerusalem they discovered Jesus, now 12 years of age, was not in the party. Full of panic, they retraced their three-day journey back to Jerusalem and found Him in the temple. The scriptures tell us He was

sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. [Luke 2:46–47]

While the Joseph Smith Translation tells us the doctors were hearing Him and asking Him

questions, I like to imagine the Savior taking the opportunity to learn and to teach in a gospel discussion in the temple.

Mary's reaction when they finally found Jesus is understandable: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing" (Luke 2:48).

His response was powerful and probably not surprising to His parents, who knew Him well: "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).

The business of the Savior was about learning and teaching—a fitting example to all of us. The Lord has promised us that what we learn in this world will be a benefit to us in the worlds to come.

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come. [D&C 130:18–19]

Brothers and sisters, it is my prayer that we all may be seekers of the truth in our personal and spiritual lives. I pray as well that we will strive to expand our knowledge of this wonderful world in which we live and that we will use this spiritual and secular knowledge we obtain to bless the lives of our children and all with whom we associate.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.