

“Mormon’s Warning: Arming Your Home and Family”

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I was taught by loving parents and wise mission presidents that there is a principle of life that I would do well to obey. They called it “marrying up.” I was obedient to their counsel, and it has made all the difference. Michele is my best friend, and I am honored to be her husband and stand with her today.

In January of 2005 the Philadelphia Eagles were playing in our fourth consecutive NFC Championship game. That sounds pretty sweet if you are an Eagles fan. But we lost the first three against the St. Louis Rams, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and finally the Carolina Panthers. Each loss was more devastating than the previous one.

Thankfully, we were led by an indomitable coach named Andy Reid. He helped us stay mentally strong and push each other to get back for the fourth year in a row.

That fourth game against the Atlanta Falcons was played on a freezing cold Philadelphia winter evening with a foot of snow on the ground. As the starting tight end, I almost did not get a chance to play in that game because of an injury to my triceps I received in the playoff game the week before. I got as much treatment as I could from my trainers in the week leading up to the big game. The Eagles did everything they could to help me get back on the field.

But there was something more to be done. I asked my dad to give me a priesthood blessing when he flew out for the game. It was something he had done many times before.

So just a few hours before the biggest game of my life, I was surrounded by my family in a hotel room next to the stadium. My dad and two brothers put their hands on my head and gave me a priesthood blessing. The feeling I felt was one of peace and comfort. I am sure that you know just the feeling I am describing. With the pressure of the game on my shoulders, it was nice to feel that feeling. It was a miracle.

The game went better than I could have dreamed. I caught two touchdowns to help our team beat the Falcons and earn a spot in Super Bowl 39, something I will never forget.

But before I tell you why I did not play one down in the Super Bowl, I need to explain what happened when I caught my second touchdown pass. I twisted to catch a pass in the corner of the end zone, and my left foot exploded. As I was falling to the ground, holding the football tight in my arms, time seemed to stop, and the rush and speed of the game stood still.

I remember very clearly thinking that we were going to the Super Bowl. At the same time, I also knew that I would not be playing.

Immediately, there came a feeling into my mind that I can only describe as divine. It was the exact same feeling I had when my dad was giving me a blessing. I felt peace and comfort. I knew that everything was as it should be.

I remained seated as I celebrated the touchdown. When the other tight end helped me up, I told him that I broke my foot. What actually happened was that I tore the Lisfranc ligament in my foot. That was the key ligament which held my foot together from top to bottom and from side to side.

It was the most exciting, disappointing moment of my life.

X-rays in the locker room concluded that I had positively torn my Lisfranc and that I would not be playing in the Super Bowl.

After the X-rays were taken, we huddled as a family in an exam room in the training room. Again, hands were laid on my head, and again I was blessed by my dad and brothers with a priesthood blessing. And once again I had the feelings of peace and comfort. Even in the midst of disappointment and frustration, there was peace and strength, there was love. My parents and my family brought me to the divine peace of the Savior.

Some may wonder why I received such a severe injury when I had just barely been given a priesthood blessing before the game. I came away from that experience understanding that a testimony of God and the living Christ was much more important than physical health.

Don't ever hesitate to ask for a blessing. It might be the best thing for both you and the person who is giving the blessing. Priesthood blessings are one of the great tools the Savior gives us to protect our families.

Michele and I have thought long and hard about you, and about this topic: "Mormon's Warning: Arming Your Home and Family."

What do we learn from the Book of Mormon about this?

The Nephites prepared countless times for possible attacks, both expected and unknown. Captain Moroni helped the Nephites stay one step ahead of the Lamanites because he sought the inspiration of heaven to defend his people.

In Alma 49, it says, “But behold, to their uttermost astonishment, they were prepared for them, in a manner which never had been known among the children of Lehi. Now they were prepared for the Lamanites, to battle after the manner of the instructions of Moroni. “And it came to pass that the Lamanites, or the Amalickiahites, were exceedingly astonished at their manner of preparation for war” (Alma 49:8–9).

I love that description! How can we be like the Nephites and protect our homes and families?

Moroni made their weak places strong. He had a ditch dug around their cities with a high bank of earth thrown up and also walls of stone to protect them. He had their bodies covered in armor with shields, breastplates, and head-plates. What spiritual and temporal tools and defenses can we fashion to prepare our “young people [who] are being raised in enemy territory” (Boyd K. Packer, “Counsel to Youth,” *Ensign*, November 2011)?

Like the Nephites, we have been prepared after the manner of living prophets. And when we are obedient to the counsel of our prophets and apostles, we will be blessed and protected. Our homes will be strong.

The greatest defense in the universe is the gospel of Jesus Christ, His atonement, His love, His protection, His wisdom and peace.

As parents we can help our children find their way to the Savior’s presence. We can guide them to real safety. We can love and encourage them when they feel awkward and unworthy. We can even carry them when they lose strength or hope or faith. We can lovingly ask them tough questions about morality and about their surroundings in school. We can have the courage to tell them no when the Spirit urges us to do so, even when we feel peer pressure to go along with the crowd.

When Elder [Patrick] Kearon spoke in priesthood session of general conference in October of 2010, he shared an invitation from the Savior to the Nephites [3 Nephi 17:7] which touched my heart. Elder Rasband—he also quoted the same verse this last conference.

Listen as the Savior invites parents to bring our children to Him. This word *bring* is one of the tools we can use to astonish the adversary. It takes love, the Savior’s love—something the adversary doesn’t understand.

[Video E. Kearon’s.]

“Bring them hither”—that is the invitation. Bring them to Christ. How can we do it?

Let our homes ring with great music that will bring our children to Christ. If we don't help our children know what great music is, who will? If we don't help them learn to have an appetite for inspiring and uplifting music, I guarantee the enemy to their souls will have no problem stealing their peace and replacing it with the words and rhythms and beats and lyrics which is the only evil thing available in the great and spacious building.

There are companies and organizations in this world who are laboring and scheming in board rooms with high-IQ individuals who have resources of money and marketing power and appeal, who will stop at nothing to get our children surrounded with their filthy music and to view their wicked images. They will do anything to make their message look cool and sound hip.

Our children are counting on us to help them find the way. They are counting on us to lead them and guide them and to walk beside them. They are counting on us.

The lines of right and wrong are purposely made blurry by the evil one. Of our time, President Boyd K. Packer has said, "I know of nothing in the history of the church or in the history of the world to compare with our present circumstances. Nothing happened in Sodom and Gomorrah which exceeds the wickedness and depravity which surrounds us now" (Brigham Young University J. Reuben Clark Law Society Devotional, 28 February, 2004).

Women's Conference is the perfect setting to share President Heber J. Grant's quote about *you* in the middle of these important times. President Uchtdorf just quoted this—I love President Uchtdorf.

"Without the devotion and absolute testimony of the living God in the hearts of our mothers, this Church would die" (Heber J. Grant, *Gospel Standards*, comp. G. Homer Durham (1941), 151).

You are strong. Strong enough to bring those you love to the feet of the Savior.

My mom did that for me 22 years ago as I was preparing for my mission. Four months before I went to Taiwan, my dad suffered a massive stroke. It happened on the night of July 2. Before my dad was taken to the hospital, he was given a priesthood blessing by my brother Jason, who had just returned from his mission to Argentina, as well as our home teacher, Larry Heaps.

Once we got to the emergency room, it was obvious that my dad's condition was life threatening. He was given an MRI to accurately diagnose the source of the extreme pain coming from his head. The image from the MRI showed he had an aneurysm that would kill him unless the clot could be removed and the bleeding stopped.

He was rushed into brain surgery. We found a room where we could be alone, and my mom asked Larry Heaps to offer a prayer for my family, and for my dad. I remember kneeling on the ground—it was hard—and crying as Larry prayed for all of us. I felt almost too weak to walk, but there he was, helping us into the presence of the Savior.

My mom knew that was what we needed. That was how she was raised by her parents. After a lifetime of them bringing her to the Savior, she was doing the same thing for our family. The doctor told us that the chance of my dad surviving surgery did not look good.

Our prayers were answered, and my dad's life was spared. The surgery was serious enough that we were told he would never move his left side again. Over the next two months that he stayed in the hospital, we witnessed miracles, both small and great. Not only did he regain the ability to walk, but as a family we found the love and grace of God in the middle of our tribulations. We loved and cherished one another more than we ever had before. We discovered what Victor Hugo meant in his Christian story of *Les Miserables*, that “to love another person is to see the face of God.”

In those delicate and trying days after my dad's stroke, my mom taught us the lessons shared by President Monson, how important it was that we, “Think to Thank, and Pause to Pray.”

She went to the gift shop of the hospital and purchased a small journal, which she called our “blessings book.” We gathered together as a family for prayer each night and we would write in the blessings book everything we were thankful for. Instead of dwelling on things we didn't have, she helped us focus on things that we did have.

My parents taught me that prayer was more important than money and faith more powerful than the cords of death.

My parents taught me the power of great music as my dad listened to his favorite tape of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the *Ode to Joy*, over and over again in his hospital room. That music helped create an atmosphere where miracles could take place. He was surrounded by great music.

My parents had armed our home and family with the gospel of Jesus Christ. During those two months, we fasted and prayed. Our neighbors, friends and ward members fasted and prayed with us and for us. We gathered in the hospital each night for family prayer, and we were given the strength to move forward for another day.

It was a miracle to each one of us who were involved in his healing process. I received and opened my mission call in his hospital room. I couldn't wait to get to Taiwan and let the people know about the restoration of the priesthood that had just saved my Dad's life and helped him return to health.

Being a missionary changed my life. As I worked to bring my Chinese brothers and sisters to Christ, I found that they brought me closer to Christ. My mission presidents,

Kent Watson and Tim Stratford, tutored me and encouraged me with wisdom to follow the Savior. So did my companions. That was the Lord's university. It is available to every young man and woman in the church.

When I was playing for the Eagles, the commissioner of the NFL, Paul Tagliabue, asked me to be an ambassador for the NFL in China. I knew I wasn't the smartest player in the NFL, but I was the *only* one who could speak Mandarin Chinese.

One of my first assignments was to cover the Super Bowl in Chinese for the first live broadcast to China. I was thrilled, but then I realized I did not know how to say quarterback in Chinese. That could be a real problem. Sure I could speak Chinese, but I was limited to speaking missionary Chinese. I had no problem teaching about the Atonement, but how was I going to describe the game without knowing any of the vocabulary?

I called the league office the following day and let them know that I was probably not the best fit to be in the television booth. They just told me I would be fine.

OK. I told them to hang on, "You'll get what you get and you won't throw a fit."

I studied my old missionary stuff and prepared the best that I could. It was not a surprise to me, but it may have been to others, that in describing plays on the field, I testified that Tom Brady was throwing true passes.

When my Chinese broadcast partner made a big deal out of the fact that I had four children at the time, I responded to him that, "Shr Jye Shang Mei You Cheng Gung Neng Ni Bu Jya Ting de Shr Bai." Which means, "No success in the world can compensate for failure in the home." Very good, very good.

The NFL has given me many opportunities around the world to share my love of football. Last year I was asked to hike Mt. Kilimanjaro with Jeff Fisher, the head coach of the St. Louis Rams, and Tedy Bruschi, the three-time Super Bowl champion middle linebacker of the New England Patriots.

We were asked to accompany four wounded warriors from our nation's military who had just been injured in Iraq and Afghanistan. Two of the warriors had their right legs amputated below the knee as a result of IED blasts, one suffered from severe post traumatic stress disorder, and the other had her right eye blown out.

The summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro was 19,341 feet. The hike would take us five days up and two days to get back down.

Our guide, Nickson Moshi, had been to the summit over 500 times. When he spoke, we listened. He told us that above 18,000 feet was considered the danger zone, and our lives depended on trusting his words and commands.

The scenery was majestic, and the views above the clouds were breathtaking. We were there to help shine the spotlight on the Wounded Warrior Project, which helps our veterans return from war with their injuries, which are both seen and unseen, and get back into life and find jobs and get into school.

As we climbed, we spoke with the warriors and learned of their incredible experiences in war. The statement of standing in harm's way for our freedom took on a whole new meaning for us.

There were hilarious moments, like when Bryan Wagner would step in freezing cold mountain runoff water with his titanium leg and tell us how cold it was.

The higher up the mountain we climbed, the more tired we all felt. Our goal was to help all of the warriors stand on the summit. That goal was not to be realized, as two of the warriors started to experience some real problems.

The first was Ben Lunak. His stump started to deteriorate. It was swollen and painful, and the skin was breaking down and wearing against his prosthetic leg.

The day before we would summit, Ben let us know that he would not be able to finish the climb. He was escorted to a stretcher and carried back down the mountain by the porters who were there to help us carry all of our gear.

One of the best parts of the expedition is when Tedy Bruschi pulled Ben aside just before he was put on the stretcher. Tedy let Ben know how proud of him we all were. And then he told Ben that a part of him was going to the summit after all. Tedy asked Ben to give him his leg!

Tedy put his leg into his backpack and charged up the mountain.

After another full day of hiking, we had dinner and then rested for a couple of hours, and then hiked through the night for the summit. It was the steepest and most difficult part of the entire trip.

When we were within two thousand feet of the summit, another one of the warriors had a problem. Michael Wilson, a Marine from Maryland, started throwing up like crazy. We waited on the trail for him to get better, but it never happened. Altitude sickness hit Michael very hard. One of our guides told Michael that if he tried to go any higher, he would lose his life. In tears, he trusted the guide and headed back down the mountain for safety.

The rest of our group continued on up the mountain. When we were getting close to the summit, Tedy let me know that he was exhausted and asked if I would help him carry Ben's leg. I felt bad that Tedy had carried it this whole way, and I grabbed the leg and threw it in my backpack. Then the sun rose over Africa. After hiking all night, it was a glorious sight to see.

As a group, we finally made it to the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro. It was a triumphant moment to take a picture and wave our banners at the top of the mountain.

Notice Jeff Fisher holding Ben's leg in this photo at the top. And of course I had to represent for BYU on the roof of Africa!

Since we did not have supplemental oxygen, we all had terrible headaches. I have never had a headache like that before, even after getting smashed in football games. It was altogether different. And it was a reminder that we were in the danger zone. I couldn't wait to get back down where the air was full of oxygen and we would be out of harm's way.

But I had one more banner to wave. Sister Dalton had given me this gold banner of virtue to wave at the summit. Virtue is another powerful tool to help arm our home and family in these last days.

I had my family sign this banner before I left for the trip. And when I pulled it out, I thought of them and shouted, "Hurrah for Israel!" All the people on hand target thought I was crazy.

Families are forever and they are worth fighting for. They are worth doing whatever we can to arm them with righteousness for the battles that surround us.

We had a long, long way to go to get down. At that elevation, my strength was almost gone. It was difficult to catch my breath.

I had a guide named Damian that was hiking down with me. He noticed that I was getting very tired and asked me if he could carry my backpack.

I told him that I was carrying Ben's leg and that I needed to do it myself. Even though I was so tired that I was ready to tip over and collapse, I had too much pride to let Damian help me to safety.

About 15 seconds later, Damian said, "Chad, let me carry your backpack. My job is to help you get back to camp safely. I am not tired at all. I do this every week. The altitude does not bother me one bit. Please let me carry your backpack and help you get back to camp safely."

In desperation and exhaustion, I gave my backpack to Damian. Why was I so stubborn that I resisted his help at first? Why did I have so much pride that I was ready to tip over and faint before I let him help me?

As I was walking down, I thought of the Savior standing with open arms, waiting for me to go to Him. I thought of my own pride and the times when I have been slow to hear Him. I thought of His Atonement, and His invitation to cast my burdens at His feet. His

loving kindness was overpowering. His peace and love and mercy was what I wanted more than anything.

As soon as we were back in camp, I gave Damian a great big hug, and I told him how much I loved him for helping me get back to my family in one piece.

Our whole team made it down the mountain. We were exhausted. It took us two days to hike all the way down to the bottom. Michael Wilson required a stretcher to get down because his condition had gotten worse since he had thrown up so much on the trail.

An amazing thing happened once we finally got to the bottom. Our headaches were gone. Even Michael Wilson felt great. In fact, he wanted to eat some pizza. Surprised me—I thought he was going to be sent to the emergency room for sure. But once he was out of danger, once he was back to safety, with air that was full of oxygen, he felt better than before. He was more grateful than ever for his health, and his life.

The Savior is our defense. He is our peace. Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. He is worth any sacrifice to be obedient to His commandments. His tools of prayers, scripture study, fasting, faith, priesthood blessings, great music, and love, will help us return to Him. As parents, remember His invitation to “bring them hither that I may heal them.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.