

"May Christ Lift Thee Up"

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"My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and eternal life, rest in your mind forever" (Moroni 9:25).

I hope you won't mind if we delay talking about that verse for a while. I'd like to take you around the neighborhood, through some friendly streets and alleys, and then finally in the back door, where we'll meet up once again with Mormon and Moroni.

For our first detour, let me take you back three or four years ago to a spring morning not unlike this one. I was driving to work down South Temple Street in Salt Lake. The sun was shining; the world seemed fresh and alive; there were daffodils everywhere and lots of that vibrant new green that we only see in the early spring. I was feeling good. It was one of those days when everything seemed to be right in my world. You know the kind of day. I was overwhelmed with love for my husband—he seemed particularly handsome and good; my children seemed like they were going to make it in the world. And they were nice people, too. We were all in good health; in fact, at that moment I felt extraordinarily healthy and strong. I thought about all of the wonderful people—friends, neighbors, associates at work—who made my world so good. My thoughts went to the day ahead. Yes, it was going to be a good one. There was work ahead that I felt I could do—work that was satisfying and interesting and that might even make a difference. I'm telling you, the cheerfulness in my car was almost edible!

Yet even as I was reviewing how great my life was, part of me was looking on saying, *What's going on here? None of the hard data in your life has changed that much, and yet everything seems wonderfully better this morning than it was last week!* My analytical nature surfaced: *Maybe the biorhythms are peaking; perhaps there has been a sudden change in serotonin levels; or maybe I created extra endorphins on my morning walk.* Anyway, even as I looked for ways to explain it (I didn't really care how it happened), the daffodils were catching the sun, and I was happy. Arriving at the office a little early that morning—*isn't that what you would do on a practically perfect day?*—I even had time to leaf through my scriptures.

Now, let me interrupt this happy picture and take you to a different scene. This is

one a friend described to me. On this particular morning she lay in a psychiatric hospital at the bottom point of a terrible battle with an emotional illness. The war had exhausted her. She lay there thinking that she no longer knew herself. All of the talents, characteristics, and abilities she had developed over her life seemed to have fled. The things she had done in the past no longer brought meaning. Her husband, children, parents, and friends were in tatters. Prayer, scriptures, blessings—nothing seemed to help. She said the image that came to her so forcefully that morning was the picture of a tree stump, cut off at ground level, all of the living branches gone, a maimed and broken thing.

I have been thinking of my daffodil day—and also of that tree stump. Is there a symbol, or a sign, or an idea that is so fundamental to life that it would speak to both of those days?

The ankh is a symbol that is common in Egyptian art. It is simple and beautiful. The ankh is called the sign of life, the symbol of life, or sometimes the key of life. We know little about its meaning anciently until the period of the Coptic Christians, when we begin to see it take more of the form and meaning of the cross.

Now, I have told you that on that spring morning I reached for my scriptures, still thinking of my incredible sense of well-being, and started paging through the Topical Guide, stopping on the word *cheerful*. As I read through the sentence stubs, I was surprised by a pattern:

"Be of good cheer, it is I" (D&C 61:36).

"Be of good cheer, for I will lead you along" (D&C 78:18).

"Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

That touched a chord. Everything about my morning became an expression of gratitude to the Savior: the spring morning spoke of him, eternal ties and family relationships spoke of him, my health, strength, work—it all found meaning because of him.

Now to my friend in the hospital. She said, "My mind wasn't working right, and so I was unable to get the daily reassurance that you depend on to feel good. But even without that normal reassurance, as I saw the image of the stump, I was aware of the roots. Somehow, I knew that I still had roots and that there would be growth again someday. I knew that the time would come when I would look back and see this impaired time almost like Rip Van Winkle. I knew my mind wasn't working right. But even as I knew that, I could *feel* those roots alive—somewhere very, very deep underground."

"Lift up your head and be of good cheer" (3 Nephi 1:13).

"Be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you" (D&C 68:6).

Jesus Christ. Our sign of life, our key to life in all of its majestic and meaningful

simplicity, is Jesus Christ. He fits every door, every life experience, every death experience that any mortal can possibly encounter. He is the undergirding of the daffodil days, the root which teams with the hope of life, even when it has been pruned to the ground. He stands as the fountain in ancient times as well as today. He is our key to life. He is the light and the life.

If he is the key, how can we most simply express that key in terms of us, in terms of what we feel and think and do? Again, the simplicity of his life showed us the way. He said, "This is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world *to do the will of my Father*" (3 Nephi 27:13; emphasis added).

If I could borrow a simple phrase—not even a complete sentence, but just the heart of a sentence—to express the key of life in practical everyday language for us, I would use this phrase, written by Alice T. Clark in her article on humility in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*: to "joyfully, voluntarily, and quietly submit one's whole life to the Lord's will" (ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. [New York: Macmillan, 1992], 2:663).

This phrase seems to me so basic. Like the ankh, it is beautiful in its clean and simple design. It cannot be spoken without a deep and complete faith in Christ and his doctrine. And the speaking of it weds that faith to its partner, agency. When we gathered in that council in heaven, before the foundation of this world, and heard the plan in all of its simple beauty, we understood about our need for faith as well as the importance of our Father's gift to us: agency. And we understood about the central and saving role of our Elder Brother. I'm sure it seemed wonderful in its simplicity to us then, just as it is now.

Everything since that premortal experience persuades and calls for us to exercise faith in Christ, using our agency to choose him and his ways.

Scriptural synonyms give rich and deep meaning to this phrase:

"Spiritually born of God" (Alma 5:14).

"To take upon them his name and always remember him" (D&C 20:77).

"To love God with all your might, mind and strength" (Moroni 10:32).

"An eye single to the glory of God" (D&C 4:5).

"For we shall be like him" (Moroni 7:48).

"To offer a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (2 Nephi 2:7).

I love the picture of the charming little girl on the Mary Engelbreit greeting card, her heart in outstretched hands and the caption reading "Here!" (used by permission).

Now, I am going to repeat our key-of-life phrase again, and for the next few minutes

we are going to talk about all of the wonderful implications that roll out when we submit our whole lives to the Lord's will: to "joyfully, voluntarily, and quietly submit one's whole life to the Lord's will."

If, in fact, we do choose to submit our whole lives joyfully, voluntarily, and quietly to the Lord's will, what are some things that will follow? What will some of the immediate and natural outcomes be?

We will live our covenants, because living them is a happy choice. Covenants are not restrictive burdens; they are offerings joyfully made. We will strive to live covenants within that glorious cycle of repentance and growth. "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8).

Let me tell you about my friend Pat Pinegar, Primary General President. One day we were in a meeting together. There was a long and belabored discussion about sexual morality, particularly concerning young people. We were discussing their vulnerability and the tragic results of sin, but most of all we were talking about how to convince them to obey the law of chastity. Why would they want to remain chaste, against the flow of the world and their natural desires? Many voices, lots of ideas, and then Sister Pinegar said, "I don't understand all of this. It seems so simple. Why don't we teach them to obey just because they love Heavenly Father?"

Stops you short, doesn't it?

There was an extended silence in the meeting. Sister Pinegar is one who constantly strives to submit her whole life to God's will. Certainly a life lived with that motivation would be a covenant-keeping life—and a much simpler life.

Another implication: *Our accountability to God will be clearer, and our scrambling to meet the expectations of everyone else will be muted.* That seems to bring sweet relief, doesn't it? One of the difficult things about life can be all of the conflicting expectations of others. Everyone needs help; everyone has an idea of who we should be and what we should do. What if we have submitted our life to God's will? Then we receive direction from him and answer to him. Not that we won't accommodate and help others. Of course we will be doing that constantly. He has told us that we are to help and serve one another, but how, where, when, etc., will be answered in the peaceful corners of our hearts—between him and us.

Sister Marjorie Hinckley recently said: "We each do the best we can. My best may not be as good as your best, but it's my best. The fact is that we know when we are doing our best and when we are not. If we are not . . . it leaves us with a gnawing hunger and frustration. But when we do our level best, we experience peace" (*Church News*, 18 Apr. 1998).

Yes, when we have joyfully, voluntarily, and quietly submitted our whole lives to the Lord's will, we will not have the burden of judging ourselves or others by an outward

checklist. We can never judge the inward righteousness of another. What if someone looking at my friend in the psychiatric ward condemned her for failing to do her church work, for failing to adequately take care of her family, for contributing so little to her neighborhood? What if we condemned her, not knowing that in a very real and heart-wrenching way, she is doing her best by waiting upon the Lord's will and that holding onto that image of a root that will send forth shoots again—that simple thought—is an heroic expression of faith and agency.

Think about the Relief Society sister who seems to energetically and consistently stretch the hours of the day to serve family, church, and community. Loaves of bread, enthusiasm, and perfect visiting teaching records pour out of her front door. But we can't judge her, either. Are these things expressions of her faith and choice to align her will with the Lord's? They may be—or they may not be. Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught us about the different motivations for service. He said there "are selfish and self-centered [reasons for service] that "are unworthy of Saints." There are "those who serve out of fear of punishment or out of a sense of duty." "Although [these] undoubtedly qualify for the blessings of heaven, there are still higher reasons for service" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 14). Elder Oaks then taught us that the highest reason for service is out of a pure love of Christ.

Paul taught the same lesson about service: "Not with eyeservers, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (Ephesians 6:6–7).

What a relief! We don't have to judge ourselves or another against an incredibly long list. We are plainly and simply accountable to the Lord and to ourselves. President Gordon B. Hinckley expressed this accountability in a recent general conference address: "The work in which we are engaged is their work [meaning the Father and the Son], and we are their servants, who are answerable to them." In another talk he reminded us that it doesn't matter what others think of us: "How we regard ourselves is what is important" (*Ensign*, May 1998, 71, 4).

This accountability frees us each night, using the words of President Brigham Young, to "review the acts of the day, repent of our sins, and say our prayers; then we can lie down and sleep in peace until the morning, arise with gratitude to God, commence the labors of another day, and strive to live the whole day to God and nobody else" (*Brigham Young, Teachings of Presidents of the Church Series* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997], 25).

Which brings us to the next implication: *We will view our daily, temporal tasks and duties differently—as offerings, not as repetitive or meaningless drudgery.* It seems that every task I do—be it visiting teaching, carpooling, solving problems in the workplace, changing diapers, writing memos, making arrangements on the telephone—becomes ennobled if I do them in the spirit of an offering to God. Throughout the ages, mankind has been confused about what giving one's life to God really means—what it looks like. Some have thought it means renouncing physical comfort—wearing scratchy clothes and sleeping on hard floors. Others have thought it means drawing away from earning a living or

handling the things of the world, retreating from people and entangling relationships—particularly intimate family ones that require so much thought and care.

One of the startling and happy truths of the Restoration is the truth about the relationship between the temporal and the spiritual. President Brigham Young, again: "If I am in the line of my duty, I am doing the will of God, whether I am preaching; praying, laboring with my hands for an honorable support; whether I am in the field, mechanic's shop, or following mercantile business, or wherever duty calls, I am serving God as much in one place as another . . . In the mind of God there is no such a thing as dividing spiritual from temporal . . . for they are one in the Lord" (*Brigham Young*, 22).

Something about our mortal life says that we cannot just give our lives to God in our hearts and then withdraw from daily living. Our temporal tasks become an expression of and a builder of our commitment to him.

Elder Henry B. Eyring illustrates this point with a story about his father, also named Henry Eyring. I will use Elder Eyring's words, because they carry the heart and meaning so beautifully:

"[My father] once told me this story with the intention of chuckling at himself . . . To appreciate this story, you have to realize that it occurred when he was nearly eighty and had bone cancer. He had bone cancer so badly in his hips that he could hardly move. The pain was great.

"An assignment was given to weed a field of onions, so Dad [as the high councilor in charge of the stake farm] assigned himself [as well as others] to go work on the farm" (*To Draw Closer to God* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997], 101–2).

When others who were with Brother Eyring that day told his son about it, they said that his father's pain was terrible. Brother Eyring couldn't kneel because of his hips and went painstakingly up and down the rows, pulling himself along on his stomach—smiling, laughing, and talking as they all worked together in the field of onions.

Quoting Elder Eyring again: "Now this is the joke Dad told me on himself afterward. He said . . . after all the work was finished and the onions were all weeded, someone said to him, 'Henry, good heavens! You didn't pull those weeds, did you? Those weeds were sprayed two days ago, and they were going to die anyway.'

"Dad just roared. He thought that was the funniest thing . . . He had worked through the day in the wrong weeds. They had been sprayed and would have died anyway.

"I asked him, 'Dad, how could you make a joke out of that? How could you take it so pleasantly?' He said something to me that I will never forget . . . He said, 'Hal, I wasn't there for the weeds.'"

And then Elder Eyring turns to us and speaks: "Now, you'll be in an onion patch

much of your life. So will I. It will be hard to see the powers of heaven magnifying us or our efforts. It may even be hard to see our work being of any value at all. And sometimes our work won't go well.

"But you didn't come for the weeds. You came for the Savior" (*To Draw Closer to God*, 101–2).

Do you hear our simple key? "Joyfully, voluntarily, quietly . . ."

The next implication of our simple key is this: *We will live nobly, on a higher plane, because we will constantly think above our own individual needs.*

Sometimes it is easier to recognize a lack of nobility than it is to recognize nobility. For that reason I will tell you of my less than noble conduct one afternoon. I was in a neighborhood store, waiting for my turn and chatting with a neighbor in line next to me. Somehow the name of a mutual acquaintance came up—actually someone we both like very much but who is quite eccentric. My neighbor told a funny story about her; that reminded me of another funny story; she topped that one . . . Pretty soon we were laughing uproariously. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the clerk listening to us. It startled me into a recognition of what I was doing. I should have stopped. I didn't. But as I finished my transaction and walked to the car, I was overwhelmed with my smallness. They weren't mean or slandering stories, but I would have been ashamed if the subject of our stories had overheard us. I was so uncomfortable that I had to return later and apologize to the clerk as well as express my shame to my neighbor. Most of all, I had to let the Lord know that I knew that kind of behavior was wrong and I needed forgiveness. Nobility is a correlate of devotion to the Lord.

Justice Potter Stewart is an associate justice of the Supreme Court. He defined ethics in the following way: "Knowing the difference between what you have a right to do, and what is the right thing to do" (in Rex E. Lee, "Honesty and Integrity," address delivered at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 5 Sept. 1995).

That's a good one to think about, even memorize. "Knowing the difference between what you have a right to do, and what is the right thing to do." Quite often we have a right to lash out, to retaliate and to punish. But is it the right thing to do?

Nobility suggests that even when we receive injury, we refuse to seek petty revenge. We may seek to right a wrong, but revenge is another story. We desire to rise above our side of the story, to absorb pain and choose not to pass it on. Isn't that what the Savior did?

Next point: *We will never be truly victimized by our failures, adverse circumstances, or the bad choices of other people. Equally important, we will not be victimized by success.* Now, how could that be?

Even though our performance is uneven and awkward, there is something that we can count on as we come to Him in humility and submissiveness. It is that every event,

every task that we are a party to, can be made to benefit our souls. That is a stunning thought, isn't it? Given the natural way, there are so many things that we do or that we are victims of that could hurt our souls. Only God, through the intervention of his Son, can change, in a miraculous way we don't understand, how things will affect us.

"Pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform anything 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 32:9).

The Savior can turn negative things to our good. Rather than bitterness, when we turn to him, we can forgive. Then, our own suffering can help us develop the capacity to withhold judgment and to reach out compassionately to others who suffer.

Turning to the Savior can also protect us against our successes. We see every day evidence of how success can result in destroying a person's soul. The media holds up lives ruined by success. What if, on a daffodil day, we really, really think that all of the good things in our lives are there because we are simply so smart, so talented, so effective that everything we enjoy comes as a direct result of our work and brains?

Do you see my point? Pride and egotism injure a soul as surely as do the bitterness and pain of affliction and failure. Success is an affliction to the soul unless it is recognized for what it is—God's working in our lives. With success, as well as adversity, we pray that our performance will be consecrated for the welfare of our souls. And he will do that, because each prayer we offer will somehow be an expression that we are joyfully, voluntarily, and quietly desiring to give our lives to him. Then desperate days refine us rather than destroy us. And daffodil days become days of worship and gratitude rather than days of pride and boasting.

Another dimension: *We will live with the security that our real needs will be met and that we will be fully able to do our part in meeting the real needs of others.*

Last month our youngest child and only son—in a suit, missionary nametag on his lapel—waved as he disappeared into the plane that would drop him off in the Chile Santiago North Mission—only another hemisphere away! You know this story. I went home with that big hole in my stomach and went about my life, trying not to think of him every single minute. Well, about nine days had passed, and I was beginning to check on the mailbox more than once a day. On Thursday morning came a telephone call. A gentle man with a Spanish accent introduced himself. He said that his wife had been in sacrament meeting in Santiago the Sunday before, and our son, who had been assigned to their ward, was asked to introduce himself and bear his testimony. After the meeting she had offered to deliver a letter from him to his family, because she was leaving for general conference in Salt Lake City the following week.

You can imagine that I wasted no time in driving to the hotel to meet these good people. How do I describe that little exchange? I have just told you that you can't always

judge who the people are who have joyfully, voluntarily, and quietly given their lives to the Lord. Well, I could tell with these two. The conversation between Sister Jaramillo and me was in two different languages—her husband translated as we spoke a few words. She told me that her youngest son was in the Missionary Training Center on his way to Phoenix. She told me that she had met my son and that he was a very humble missionary. And then she reached out to me and spoke gentle Spanish words. Her husband followed: "My wife is telling you that she will take good care of your son." That took two Kleenexes to wipe up. Actually, it took all I had to prevent myself from making gasping noises as she handed me the letter. I told her that I wouldn't be in Phoenix to take care of her son but that I would pray for him.

I walked out of that hotel lobby with such a feeling of peace and comfort.

What do I really expect she could or should do for James? Stop by his apartment once a week, write him notes, cheer him up with periodic pep talks, bake cookies? No. Not at all. In fact, I doubt that she will need to do anything. Then why should I feel so good? The security I feel is rooted in her devotion to the Lord's will, because that means that if my son does have some real need, the Lord will know of it and Sister Jaramillo is at least one person in that city who would unhesitatingly respond when prompted by the Lord.

I cannot tell you the security and gratitude I feel for each of you who kneels and offers herself to the Lord. You are the ones who he will direct to teach my grandchildren, who answer the needs of my married children, who invite my missionary daughter to dinner, who carry letters home to an anxious mother, who work respectfully beside my husband. You don't need to do everything all of the time for every member of my family. But I know that if you have given yourself to do the Lord's will, you will do the right thing at the right time.

I love you.

Another implication as we use this simple key: *We will be assured success.*

This is a personal metaphor, but it helps me understand the power of guaranteed success. I hate to shop. Did I say that strongly enough? I *hate* to shop. I have very little skill and so have very limited success. And besides, I don't have good feet. Anyway, one day one of my daughters and I were shopping. She needed a particular piece of clothing for a particular occasion that would make her look close to spectacular. All this for a reasonable amount of money. Is that the worst formula? We started out in the morning full of energy and hope. But by early afternoon, we were dragging in and out of the dressing rooms. Her hair was full of static, my feet hurt, we were hungry, and we were getting grouchy. And then we had a startling idea. If we knew, absolutely guaranteed *knew*, that at the end of the afternoon we would have found the perfect dress, would it make any difference to how we felt now? We inventoried—the hair, the feet, the hunger, the discouragement—and we said unhesitatingly yes! We could easily go another three hours, *if* we knew there was unequivocal success ahead. And so we simply told ourselves that we were going to find the outfit—and, I am amazed to tell you, it worked! We were laughing and talking again instead

of whining and dragging

Could it be the same with life? Do we get exhausted because we quit believing that success is assured? You know, it is! In the sooner and later context, it might not be sooner, but it will *for sure* be later.

"Thy God shall stand by thee forever and ever. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. He that endureth in faith and doeth my will, the same shall overcome, and shall receive an inheritance upon the earth when the day of transfiguration shall come" (D&C 63:20).

There must be dozens more implications, but I will only mention one more: *We will expect to have to make this choice many, many times*. Our ongoing responsibility is to keep offering ourselves and everything that we have and are to Him—to work actively but to cease judging each task with our mortal measurements. Great paradox of the gospel: In the total giving away, we receive total abundance, the only total security available. When we submit voluntarily and joyfully, far from being passive victims, we become victors, because we have accepted a partnership with an all-powerful and all-loving Being.

We aren't in the onion patch for the weeds. We are here for him. We are here with him.

Now I've worn you out. Surely we must be at the back door. Let's walk through it and sit in the living room for a last moment with Moroni 9:25. Mormon writes his final letter (at least the last one we have) to his son Moroni. He describes the "horrible scene" (v. 20), the "depravity of my people" (v. 18), who are "without order and without mercy" (v. 18), "strong in their perversion" (v. 19), "brutal, sparing none" (v. 19). "But behold, my son, I recommend thee unto God, and I trust in Christ that thou wilt be saved" (v. 22); and then our verse:

"My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and eternal life, rest in your mind forever" (v. 25).

It doesn't matter what time we live in: the time of Mormon (421 a.d.), the 1950s (doesn't everyone talk about what a good time that was?), or this very day. It doesn't matter whether we are talking about a difficult individual environment or a sin-filled culture. The only thing that provides real lifting—lifting beyond mortality and all of its chaos and troubles, beyond our own weaknesses and sins and changing fortunes, beyond our own pain and suffering and success—the only real lifting comes through our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Daffodils do bring gladness. Healthy, happy children cause our hearts to sing. Balanced brain chemistry and physical health maximize our enjoyment of this world. Rides in convertibles, picnics in a pine-scented forest, shelter during the cold storms of winter—

these are delights I wouldn't want to have missed. Economic security lightens our load of worry. Attentive husbands and the warmth of good friends bring contentment. Accomplishment, a job well done, music, art, an exquisitely written piece of literature—yes, there are so many things that lift in happy ways, but if some of these, if all of these, were to evaporate, to be snatched away from us, cut off at ground level, we could still count on Christ: the one who did only the will of his Father, the co-creator of all that is good, the one who knows every soul—the sick, the oppressed, the gifted, the gorgeous, the abused, the charismatic, the brilliant, as well as the bumbling and stumbling soul who can't seem to make anything work. Yes, you and me. He knows us. He not only knows us but loves us so much that the focus of his mortal and heavenly life is us. His simple key is a statement about us: "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). He suffered himself to be lifted up upon the cross that we might be lifted up, back to our Father, clothed with immortality and eternal life.

And our part is easy, as simple in design as the Egyptian ankh. In faith, each of us takes the only thing we really have—our agency—and offers it back to him joyfully, voluntarily, and quietly. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.