

“Lay Aside the Things of This World, and Seek for the Things of a Better”

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I was thinking about, on January 31, the year 2008, I got up early in the morning and I put on my best church clothes, and I picked up my 15-year-old niece Jordanne, and we drove into Salt Lake City in the pre-dawn hours. President Hinckley had died earlier that week, and people could come and pay their respects at the Conference Center, which was built with his prophetic vision. And they opened the building about six o’clock in the morning and by the time we got there there’s already a big line that goes around the building. So Jordanne and I waited outside in the cold until we could get into the building. And as we walked past his casket where he was lying, she and I were talking a lot about President Hinckley, that he was the only prophet that she had known during her lifetime. And as we filed by, a phrase came into my mind that I have never forgotten, and it said: “I am a friend of the prophets.” And I thought, why did my spirit say that? And what does that mean?

I think often about President Hinckley and President Monson and what it means for you and me to live in this time of prophets, seers, and revelators.

PROPHETS SHOW VISION

A prophet’s sacred role is to lay out the vision of truth—they’re “seers,” and they see things as they really are, and not as this world seeth. And we’ve heard wonderful sessions during the Women’s Conference about what it means to live during a time of prophets. They see the big picture and how things that look unrelated actually are interrelated and how we can participate in some of those things.

President Hinckley shared a vision that actually changes our world as we know it. This is what he said. He said, “Imagine how our own families, let alone the world, would change if we vowed to keep faith with one another, strengthen one another, look for and accentuate the virtues in one another, and speak graciously concerning one another. Imagine the cumulative effect if we treated each other with respect and acceptance, [and]

if we willingly provided support. Such interactions practiced on a small scale would surely have a rippling effect throughout our homes and communities and, eventually, society at large” (*Standing for Something: 10 Neglected Virtues That Will Heal Our Hearts and Homes*, Three Rivers Press, 2000, 57). That’s President Hinckley.

President Monson said, “Never let a problem to be solved become more important than a person to be loved” (in BYU Women’s Conference address, May 2, 2008).

And the Prophet Joseph Smith once shared what he called the grand fundamental principle of Mormonism. He said, “I don’t care what a man’s character is; if he’s my friend—a true friend, I will be a friend to him, and [I will] preach the Gospel of salvation to him and give him good counsel. [I will help] him out of his difficulties. Friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of ‘Mormonism.’ [It’s designed] to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease and men to become friends and brothers. . . . Friendship is like Brother Turley in his blacksmith shop welding iron to iron; it unites the human family...” (*History of the Church*, 5:517).

Now those just weren’t nice words with Joseph. He lived that grand fundamental principle of Mormonism with of all his heart, and people responded to him in a similar way. I recently came across two stories, and they’re vivid, and so I thought I’d share them with you today.

One of them is, “While conversing with his cousin George A. Smith . . . the Prophet wrapped his arms around [George A.] and said [to him] with emotion, ‘George A., I love you as I love my own soul!’ [And] this left his cousin speechless. In fact, George A. said, ‘I could hardly speak, [I was so affected].’” In a few [minutes], after regaining his composure, [George A. said back to the Prophet], ‘I hope, Brother Joseph, that my whole life and [all my] actions will prove my feelings and the depth of my affection for you’” (*Documentary History of the Church*, 5:39).

That’s one story.

The second story is about Phineas Young—this is Brigham Young’s older brother. He was once in Tiffin, Ohio. And while he was there, he wrote to Willard Richards, who was the Prophet Joseph’s secretary, and he said, “I long to see the day when I can again visit my brethren and see the Lord’s Prophet, and hear the words of life sweetly distilling from his lips. Give my love to [the Prophet] Joseph when you see him. [And] tell him I’d come to the Rocky Mountains to see him and fight my way through an army of wildcats and Missouri wolves and live on skunks the whole journey” (“Journal History of the Church,” 14 December 1842). I love that!

Let me go back and just summarize what these powerful modern prophets are emphasizing:

- Accentuate the virtues in each other.
- Respect and acceptance have a rippling effect.
- Solving problems is less important than loving people.

- Friendship is designed to revolutionize and civilize the world.
- Wars and contentions should cease.
- Men and women can become friends and family.
- And friendship welds iron to iron. It unites the human family.

If you had one sentence about that, it could simply be this—that unity, understanding, and relationships are worth our absolute best efforts.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF ALL THINGS

I was taking in my parents' mail—they were on vacation, and so I had all of these stacks, my parents get a ton of catalogs—and I was taking them into their kitchen, and my dad gets *Scientific American*, it was sitting right up on top. And so I flipped through that and I started reading a little article about the trillions of tiny bacteria that live inside the human intestinal tract. And they operate pretty much like a forest ecosystem in the natural world. So the scientist was talking about, there are predators in that ecosystem. There are dominant species—there's all kinds of things. And as I read it I started to get a little queasy because it felt like the African savannah was inside my abdomen.

But this phenomenon shows up in the smallest biology, clear up to the largest galaxies. There's different types of systems that interdepend on each other and they cooperate together in a unified way so that a cell eventually becomes a human body; a gas bubble can cooperate until it makes a galaxy; and ant colonies are built on the same principle that we build nations on. And I can still remember sitting in my parents' pink and white kitchen as it dawned on me: small things working together in unity to make bigger things is the whole meaning of mortal life. It's why we're here.

We first have the opportunity to unify an intelligence, and a spirit, and a body. Those are separate elements, but they've come together in us and they make up our personality. While we're working on that, we get the opportunity to be sealed in a marriage partnership—so that you have a pair of people that is growing to understand each other so well that they're unified. They effectively become one in purpose. That sealed pair can be successful and united enough that they create a loyal family circle. In some rare instances, you can extend this unity out to a community or a ward or a group of colleagues. Every once in a while, people can attain that kind of oneness and unity. Enoch did it with a whole city.

This is the whole structure of the universe from the smallest to the biggest. And the Lord takes our natural feelings and experiences of friends and He encourages us to extend that out to bigger groups. Can you bind together in one a presidency? A ward council? A board? A neighborhood? A ward family? A study group? A teachers quorum? A visiting teacher route? A girls' camp? A prison? What can you do?

I want to tell you a story about a prison. Jim and Karyn Anderson are from Farmington, Utah. He was a bank executive and she is a nurse, until they put their papers in to serve a humanitarian mission. And they were called to Beirut, Lebanon. It's a stunningly

beautiful place that has been scarred by war, and factions, and disunity and suffering, and it's all happened in our lifetime. One day, Elder and Sister Anderson drove up way up in the mountains to visit a women's prison. When you get sent to prison in Lebanon, they provide food. But clothing, toiletries, bedding—all of that needs to be supplied by your family. And if you don't have family, then you don't have any of those things. So the Beirut branch had made some hygiene kits, and the Andersons drove up to the city to deliver them.

When they arrived, they were met by Madame Hanine, who is the warden of the prison. She is a young mother—you can see in that picture she's pregnant with her second baby. She is about three weeks away from delivering. She is a visionary administrator for that prison. She rolls up her sleeves and she works alongside those inmates to make it livable, and clean, and as productive as she can. The Andersons went into one of the three rooms, and they couldn't help but notice that a woman was lying on one of the mattresses on the floor, sobbing. One of the other inmates in the prison took Sister Anderson aside and she said to her in English: "Please, help the Chinese."

So Sister Anderson asked, and Madame Hanine told them that this woman was from China and she'd been employed by a family in Spain to be their nanny. The family she worked for came on vacation to Lebanon, and so they brought her to care for the kids while they were on vacation. When it was time to depart, as they were in the airport they discovered that they had brought their nanny into the country illegally. She did not have the right visa to enter Lebanon or to leave Lebanon. And instead of dealing with that situation, the family just boarded the plane and they left her there. So she was sent to this prison to await her trial on immigration violations, and in Lebanon that can take two years. And she had been crying on that mattress for three months. Her family thought she was in Spain. No one had any idea where she was. And she could not be consoled.

Any real kind of assistance is pretty unlikely. But in this circle of people who knew each other was a friendly inmate who used her skills in English to request some help. There was a sympathetic warden who had a charitable heart, and she asked the Andersons: "Isn't your church good with languages? Can you find a Chinese speaker somewhere who might help us?" There was a member of the Church in Beirut, in the Beirut branch, who knew somebody at the Chinese embassy. So they placed a phone call, and that person called her parents in China. Her parents scraped up the money to buy her a plane ticket. And the Lebanese government let her go and sent her back to China.

All of those unlikely people combined together to work on a solution to a single problem. They overcame suspicion, and cultural differences, and lack of money, and lack of communication, and they were successful.

I really believe the people in our circle are mostly a divine gift. There may be a few people in there that are kind of thrown in for spice, but I believe that the Lord puts us in proximity on purpose. We can't dismiss the people in our circles.

And C. S. Lewis has this beautiful quote that maybe you're familiar with. He said:

“In friendship ... we think we have chosen our peers. [But] in reality a few years' difference in the dates of our births, a few more miles between certain houses, the choice of one university [over] another ... the accident of a topic being raised or not raised at a first meeting—any of these chances might have kept us apart. But, for a Christian, there are, strictly speaking, no chances. A secret master of ceremonies has been at work. Christ, who said to the disciples, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,” can truly say to every group of Christian friends, “Ye have not chosen one another but I have chosen you for one another.” The friendship is not a reward for our discriminating ... good taste in finding one another out. [But] it is the instrument by which God reveals to each of us the beauties of others.”

That's a beautiful quote.

LAY ASIDE THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD

The quote for this session's topic comes from Doctrine and Covenants 25, and it's the Lord himself speaking to Emma Smith in 1830.

Interacting with other people in positive, building ways, even if they're using their agency, or their strengths, or their weaknesses, or their perceptions—and we just all know this—it's never smooth, it's never easy. And Satan delights in using any small thing to break us apart. Breaking up unity is his bread and butter. He does it all day long. And truthfully, we make it pretty easy most of the time.

I really liked that imagery of Phineas Young when he said he would fight through an army of wildcats, and Missouri wolves, and live on skunks the whole time. Because that's about what it takes to lay aside the things of this world. Just do me a favor and close your eyes for a minute and let me ask you: What do you need to lay aside? What's getting in the way of your peace? What makes up your army of wildcats? Because we all have them.

If I could share just four things that I have learned about this principle, and most of them have come from my own kind of bitter experience.

The first one is to approach situations with humility. You don't know everything that's going on. You aren't the only one that's right. We all have pieces of the truth, but we don't have the whole thing. And only the Lord has the whole thing. So be humble, because your perception could be wrong.

The second thing is to be a builder. Assume that other people have good intent even if you aren't in agreement—that they aren't just stupid. But they actually want things to work out maybe as much as you do. Jesus was a master at building with the available materials. Satan tears things down. So emphasize what is positive and what you have in common, and then see what happens.

Number three, practice tolerance and love. Forgive slights, and when you can't feel that way, when it just feels too hard for you to do, then go to the Father in prayer and ask for some help. Because the power of the Atonement can change the way we feel, and it can change the way we perceive things, and it can change the way we act. And that brings unity.

And number four, when something has to change, then deal with that person directly—and then practice one, two and three above. Their success is really your success. Let me give just a couple examples of some of these things. This world operates by the doctrine of Nehor, and that is that we prosper by the things that we hoard, by the things that we obtain, that we get, that we buy. And Jesus has counterintuitive doctrine to that. He says the things that we secure for our real, permanent life are the things that we absorb, the things that we sacrifice, the things that we lay aside, and the things that we forget.

We most of the time don't have the power inside ourselves to do those things. We're actually bad at it. But Jesus's Atonement can be the power that we use. And He is magnificent at it. He enables us to deflect the hurt and the pain from others and seek for a higher purpose. Now please bear with me, I'm going to change the words to the scripture from the Doctrine and Covenants just a little bit.

“And let every [woman] esteem [her] brother [or her sister] as herself, and practice virtue and holiness before me.

“And again I say unto you, let every [woman] esteem [her sister as herself].

“For what [parent] among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto ... one: Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here; and [he say] to the other: Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there—and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just?

“Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” That's Doctrine and Covenants 38.

I wonder often why everything good in this world is so counterintuitive. But it struck me the other day, it's because we don't want to stay in this world. We will eventually pass on to a higher order where different rules apply. And the Lord is giving us the opportunity to practice some of those rules right now.

Daughters in My Kingdom tells about the day when Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society and he called Emma Smith to be the first president. And he said during that time that his wife's calling fulfilled a prophecy given to him 12 years earlier. And then he sat down with the women there and he read the entire revelation, which is Section 25 in the Doctrine and Covenants.

In 1830, the Lord gave this beautiful, specific blessing and counsel to Emma Smith. And at the end of the revelation he said an interesting thing. He said. “I say unto you that this is my voice unto all.” Well that didn’t make very much sense in 1830, but it did in 1842, when the Relief Society was being revealed. At the founding of the Relief Society it became scriptures for the women of the Church. Those women were being organized to participate in the work of salvation—and not just the 20 women that were in that room when Joseph read it out loud. It was for all of us. As the Lord said to Emma, He now said to everyone who are sons and daughters in His kingdom: Murmur not. Continue in meekness. Beware of pride. Cleave unto the covenants you have made. Lift up your heart and rejoice.

In Emma’s own words, she said: “I desire the Spirit of God to know and understand myself that I might be able to overcome whatever of tradition or nature that would not tend to my exaltation in the eternal worlds. I desire a fruitful, active mind that I may be able to comprehend the designs of God...” (Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, 1844, Church History Library, Salt Lake City).

INVESTMENTS

I have been incredibly blessed in my life to have a friend to me who is a model of everything that Emma Smith describes. It isn’t that she is nice to me—she is. But she has succored me in my weaknesses, she has borne with me in my troubles, she’s rejoiced in good seasons. She has refused to throw my weaknesses in my face. She’s inspired me to be a better person. She’s talked to me when no one else would. She’s told me when I’m making a mistake. And she’s given me everyday support and confidence. She’s told me 10,000 times that she loves me, and she’s shared her testimony and her beliefs with me, and prayed with me even when I couldn’t. Her friendship is one of the most precious things in my life.

We all do that for our friends. You’re all sitting here with your friends and your family. And we do those things for each other. But can we also do it for people that we disagree with? Can we exchange enmity for empathy? Because that is a Christlike act, and it’s the crux of what I wanted to say today.

Invest in unity, invest in friendship, invest in trust and in forgiveness. And some people will say, “Well that doesn’t pay because those people always finish last.” And that may be true—it may be true in this world. But we are laying aside the things of this world and we are seeking for things of a better. It isn’t all about now. And when you know that and when you can do it, then you ally yourselves with a prophetic vision. And you are the friend of the prophet.

Sister Jane Clayson Johnson said this quote—I heard it when I was in the back—and it’s also in my talk. And it’s such a good quote from Elder Marlin K. Jensen, that I think it’s worth emphasizing two times.

He said: “Consider the power of each one of us, 10 million strong [that’s how many people were in the Church when he said it], of our own free will and choice reaching out ... in unconditional friendship ... The power is in each one of us ... Old and young, rich and poor, educated and humble, in every language and country, we all have the capacity to be a friend. Having been so richly blessed by Christ’s friendship, I pray that we will now be to others what He is to us ... I know that when we offer ourselves in friendship, we make a most significant contribution to God’s work and to the happiness and progress of His children” (“Friendship: A Gospel Principle,” *Ensign*, May 1999).

Now that’s something! If you want to contribute to the progress and happiness of God’s children, you can be a friend. You can act in unity. You can forgive.

TESTIMONY

I love Jesus. I can never find the words to say how I feel. He is the Great Jehovah with the voice of mighty wind. He is the one and the only true God in a world fraught with opposition and people who are false imitators of Him. He shows the great power and the good intent of Elohim over all things. He was born on this earth into the most humble of circumstances, and He was the mighty God, but he came as Emmanuel—which means God with us. He bore the weight of us physically, and with unsurpassed mental and spiritual courage. And He carried our collective load of sin and anguish and even stupidity. And He became our Father because only through Him can we gain life. He has no bureaucracy; He governs everything by love. He seeks reconciliation on every level, from the largest of bringing all mankind who want to come back to Elohim, to the smallest of helping us heal unkind words and selfish acts. His kingdom is made up of smaller things that gather together and cooperate for a larger purpose. He is a royal Son who governs His kingdom with love and temperance and brotherly kindness. And He will come a second time to the earth to gather all political kingdoms into one that is His. They will be His people, and they will be of one heart. And all knees will bow to him, not because of his might and power—which are great—but because he brings reconciliation and peace, even to our individual minds and hearts. He is the Prince of Peace.

And I can testify that the Lord loves each one of us in all of our quiriness. He listens to us more intently than anybody else in our lives. He never tires of us. He always wants us around Him. We can never give Him too much. He waits with longsuffering to build us, to guide us, to heal us, to tell us the things that we need to know. He is our greatest friend. And when we turn around and give those same gifts to others, when we seek to understand them and not to judge them, when we “lay down our weapons of war” and we become the friend of the prophets—then we become the friends of God.

This is my prayer for our families, for our relationships, for the councils of the Church, and for every one of us in our hearts. And I say it in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.