

Your Good Name

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Thank you, President Snow, for that introduction. It is a thrill for me to think of you in so many settings. I have tremendous respect for you, the work you are doing, and the decisions you are making at this time in life. If I have ever visited with any of you in the past, perhaps you noticed that my name has changed. I was married in April to a wonderful man who had also lost his spouse. I am appreciative that not only did President Snow use the correct name, but he also pronounced it correctly.

Has anyone ever mispronounced your name? I would guess that even though we each try to overlook such an error when it occurs, it always feels a little disappointing that the person doesn't really know you or perhaps has not given you much careful consideration.

After being Janette Hales for forty years, it has been no small project to change my name on written documents. One business sent my statement as Janette Hales Beck. When I called to make a correction, the secretary replied lightly, "Oh, Janette Hales Beckham is too long for the line on the computer."

My experiences have kept me thinking about names. In the state of Utah it is not unusual to have towns named after people

in the Book of Mormon. I heard of a tourist couple who were driving through Utah and commenting on the unusual names of the towns. As they saw Nephi on the map, the wife said, "Do you suppose that is Nep-hi?" Her husband responded, "Perhaps Nephy." They decided to stop for lunch, and when the waitress brought their check, she asked if she could do anything else to help them. The gentleman said, "Tell us how to pronounce the name of this place." The waitress responded, "Burger King."

Just as a little child starts to develop a sense of identity as he or she repeatedly hears a name, I believe our names are important to our identity always. As a young mother I returned to take a class from the university I attended and found naturally that things were very much changed. I didn't know anyone. One day one of my past professors came into the room, noticed me, and said, "Janette Callister, how nice to see you." She turned to my current professor and said she remembered

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me as a good student. I still remember the good feeling I had that somebody really knew me and remembered me for good. Many of you perhaps share with me that great feeling of being recognized in a positive way when you are in a strange place.

One of my dear friends said her son tried out as a walk-on for the BYU football team. One day during the tedious drills, Coach LaVell Edwards said, “How ‘ya doing, Hogan?” Her son came home with new enthusiasm and reported, “Coach Edwards knew my name.” As a national leader in the football profession, Coach Edwards has become known as one who knows his players, both present and past, and calls them by name. This is no small accomplishment when you have names such as Elias Fahapula, Itula Mili, and Vaha Ongongotau.

As a young wife I often gave my name as Mrs. Robert Hales at places like the cleaners or when doing business over the telephone. I realize I did that because it was easier to spell. When I said “Janette Hales,” almost always someone would ask, “How do you spell it?” When I said “Mrs. Robert Hales,” at least the Robert or Bob part was a little easier.

One day when one of my daughters was going through registration in college, she called to ask if I would come down and sign for her so she and her roommates wouldn’t have to pay a deposit for the telephone. Evidently someone with a home and an account with the phone company could guarantee a new account. After standing in a very long line (which I’m sure most of you could relate to), I got to the clerk with the necessary paperwork filled out. To my surprise she said, “You don’t have an account with us.” I FELT NONEXISTENT! I knew I had been paying bills to the telephone company for twenty years, but my name was not Robert Hales. From that time on I made sure I had a name. I made sure my name was recorded on accounts, that it was spelled correctly, and I used my name.

Names are always important, and names have meaning. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, naming is a priesthood ordinance, and it comes with a blessing. It is significant that we are known by the name our parents choose for us on the records of the Church and throughout our mortal lives. This given name has importance in all the priesthood ordinances, including the endowment and the sealing temple ordinances.

We use other names that are meaningful as we mature and take responsibility. New names bring blessings, and not just for babies.

Missionaries become “elder” and “sister” and all but forget their first names. This is a symbolic but very real manifestation of their putting aside their own pursuits to be joined to the purposes of the Lord. Other names bring blessings and responsibilities: Mother, Father, Bishop, President.

Before record keeping began, most people had only one name, such as John. As the population increased, it became necessary to distinguish between individuals with the same name. Descriptive information had to be added, such as John Christiansen (son of Christian), John Geldzahler (gold counter), or John Rotkoph (redhead).

This practice still happens today. Elder Packer told of one young boy who, until he was four years old, thought his name was Johnny . . . Stop. Sometimes we use as names or as nouns words that would be less limiting as adjectives. Have you ever heard parents say, “Oh, he’s our athlete” or “She’s our scholar”—as if we only have to be one thing. Our naming or descriptions may unintentionally limit a person’s self-image: “Oh, she’s our little tomboy” or “I guess he is our black sheep” (as if we each had to have one). A label is attached when a person may only be showing a temporary interest or a momentary struggle. Beware of names that are negative or limiting.

You might ask your parents how your name was selected. Listen to what Helaman tells his sons Nephi and Lehi about their names:

Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good.

Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do that which is good. [Helaman 5:6–7]

Nephi and Lehi carried in their names the identity of the good works of their ancestors. Just as your name gives identity to you, your behavior can give identity to your own name. When you are born, the identity is given to you as your parents give you your name. An infant's identity is attached to the parents or caregivers. Children gradually enlarge their identity to family and even belongings, then later to friends, school, labels, styles. Yet we are reminded in Proverbs "Even a child is known by his doings" (20:11). Let's consider the identity we get through attachments. I remember many years ago attending a high school basketball tournament after my own children had all graduated. I had somehow forgotten the noise and enthusiasm of such an event. As we found our places in the upper balconies surrounded by students with the right colors, I quickly evaluated the appropriate behavior for the occasion. In my detached state, the scene momentarily became rather humorous to me. A student observing my momentary stupor seemed to increase his volume as he chanted, his eyes bulging and the veins prominently standing out on his neck: "We're Number One! We're Number One!

We're Number One!" Something devious in me wanted so badly to whisper, "Number one what?" All we had done was buy a three-dollar ticket.

We're Number One—I call that identity by attachment. My team is outstanding, therefore I am outstanding. A bit temporary but a good feeling nonetheless. We might consider some of those attachments that give us temporary identity. It is easy to get stuck there. The right club, the right car, the right clothes may seem who we are—identity by attachment. There is danger in this. The Savior warned, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (3 Nephi 14:21). But he warned the hypocrite, "And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you" (verse 23). Strengthening our identity with our Heavenly Father takes a different kind of commitment. It has much more to do with our behavior than our belongings. Usually as a person matures spiritually, more of identity comes from developing one's own talents and increasing one's ability to serve others. As you mature, your life and characteristics will give identity to your name. Your work and behavior will better define who you are.

Perhaps many of you have read the story of President George Albert Smith that he referred to as "Your Good Name." He described an experience he had in his later years.

I became so weak as to be scarcely able to move. It was a slow and exhausting effort for me even to turn over in bed.

One day, under these conditions, I lost consciousness of my surroundings and thought I had passed to the Other Side.

George Albert Smith described what he saw and then wrote:

I saw a man coming towards me. I became aware that he was a very large man, and I hurried my steps to reach him, because I recognized him as my grandfather. . . . I remember how happy I was to see him coming. I had been given his name and had always been proud of it.

When Grandfather came within a few feet of me, he stopped. His stopping was an invitation for me to stop. Then—and this I would like the . . . young people never to forget—he looked at me very earnestly and said:

“I would like to know what you have done with my name.”

Everything I had ever done passed before me as though it were a flying picture on a screen—everything I had done. Quickly this vivid retrospect came down to the very time I was standing there. My whole life had passed before me. I smiled and looked at my grandfather and said:

“I have never done anything with your name of which you need be ashamed.”

He stepped forward and took me in his arms, and as he did so, I became conscious again of my earthly surroundings. My pillow was as wet as though water had been poured on it—wet with tears of gratitude that I could answer unashamed.

President Smith continued:

*I have thought of this many times, and I want to tell you that I have been trying, more than ever since that time, to take care of that name. So I want to say to . . . the young men and women, to the youth of the Church and of all the world: Honor your fathers and your mothers. Honor the names that you bear, because some day you will have the privilege and the obligation of reporting to them (and to your Father in heaven) what you have done with their name. [George Albert Smith, *Sharing the Gospel with Others* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1948), p. 111–12]*

What a wonderful heritage George Albert Smith had received from his grandfather,

and he was able to continue that righteous tradition. Perhaps some would relate more, however, to the experience of a young woman who shared her story in the *New Era*. This young woman, a convert, came from such a wildly dysfunctional family that she decided she had bad blood. She felt second class to life-long Church members she considered “born in the covenant.” Through a priesthood blessing the young woman was told that the story of Ruth had a special message for her. She read the story but at first didn’t understand the significance. She writes what happened:

*Finally, through the Spirit, it came to me. The key was at the very end of the book, where it mentions Ruth’s part in the lineage of . . . Christ. Ruth, . . . the convert from a foreign land, showed such great faith that she became an integral part of the most blessed bloodline of all. This great woman, who came from generations of idol worshipers, would be a forebear of the Savior of the world. [Kay Hago, “From One of the Best Families,” *New Era*, June 1991, p.20]*

The young woman added that just one scripture story helped her find her place in life and the kingdom by teaching that no blessing would be withheld from her because she wasn’t born to LDS parents. She found out she came from the best of families, our Heavenly Father’s family. As this woman strengthened her identity with our Heavenly Father, she felt differently about her potential and her purpose in life.

We have accounts in biblical history when the change of a person’s name becomes a symbol of a major change in a person’s life. When the Lord appeared to Abram when he was ninety-nine, he said:

Walk before me, and be thou perfect. . . .

. . . behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. [Genesis 17:1–5]

Jacob's name was changed to Israel at the time he saw God (see Genesis 32:28). The apostle Paul was known as Saul in his early life, but he was called Paul after the beginning of his ministry (see Acts 13:9).

A friend pointed out that Paul's references as he introduced himself changed as his ministry progressed. In Corinthians he referred to himself as an apostle and later as a servant (see Romans, Philippians, and Titus), a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and a fellow laborer (see Philemon).

It is interesting that as Paul's ministry progressed, his self-identity seemed to become less important or at least secondary to his work in representing the name of Jesus Christ and His teachings in establishing the Church. He had strengthened his identity with our Heavenly Father, and God's purpose became his purpose.

As I considered changing my name, I thought perhaps I could learn to be a better person. After deciding to remarry, there were many decisions to be made, such as where we would live. It seems a bit immature now that I think about it, but none of the decisions seemed more important to me than what I would be called. I had been Janette C. Hales for forty years, and it bothered me when one of my children said, "I guess we won't be the Hales' family any more." Of course we will, but they had to think through their mother having a different name. When the marriage announcements went out, someone from the Church magazines called the Young Women office and asked what I would be called after my marriage. My secretary instructed very clearly that I would be Janette Hales Beckham. The person on the other end of the line asked, "But will she be Sister Hales or Sister Beckham?"

A friend of mine suggested I might try her husband's advice to her: "If you give a poor talk, use your maiden name."

I remember well the day my first granddaughter was blessed and named Emily Janette. Her parents had chosen to give her my name. My heart reached out as her father, holding the Melchizedek Priesthood, took her in his arms and gave her a name and a blessing. I found myself wanting all the best for this little granddaughter. As I expressed my love and bore my testimony that day, I thought how my feelings must be in small measure how our Heavenly Father must feel as we take upon us the name of His Son, Jesus Christ. I am reminded that He wants all the best for us. With His name we have the opportunity to become changed and take upon ourselves His attributes.

For little Emily, now four years old, as well as for each one of us, this requires learning and experience as well as a great deal of commitment. Although we are each innocent at birth, we are basically self-centered, lacking in experience, and quite intent on survival.

At baptism Emily will take upon herself the name of Jesus Christ as most of us have done. That responsibility and blessing becomes our new identity. Attend baptisms. Listen to the words. I believe we have to make a conscious effort to strengthen our identity with our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Attend confirmations. Listen to the blessings when the Holy Ghost is given. We must each remind ourselves of our eternal identity.

Recently a young woman wrote to me with concerns about her progress. She wrote:

I have been wondering about making it back to our Heavenly Father. Worried is more like it. My mom once told me that to worry is to lack faith in God, so using that word kind of makes me cringe. But, to me I feel if I don't make it even when I try my hardest, it will be the biggest disappointment. I guess you could say that I have little faith. Little

everything is more like it. You asked us what is the biggest problem facing the [young people] in the Church today. Among the answers some gave were drugs, alcohol, things like that. While those, along with teenage pregnancies, are rich among the community, I don't think that those are the main problems. Yes in the world, but not in the Church. To me, I see struggling to know who we are. Struggling to know the truth, wanting to be loved and cherished for what we do, needing lots of hugs and "I love you's," needing to feel needed.

This is a wonderful letter—so normal, so honest, so sincere. Sometimes we feel our faith is “little” when it is really just young and inexperienced. Sometimes when we add a long list of emotional needs to our need to know who we are, we confuse the issue. Focusing on finding ways to strengthen your personal identity will very likely help get some of the other needs met in the proper time. You do strengthen your identity with our Heavenly Father when you practice doing the things He has asked you to do.

How can you strengthen your own personal identity? I can tell you how in three simple words. Do good things! If that sounds too simplistic, let's try three other words. Keep the commandments! I could continue. Do more good! Love one another! Serve one another! I could continue. Keep a journal! President Spencer W. Kimball said through keeping a journal we come to know ourselves (see *TSWK*, p. 351; also see “President Kimball Speaks Out on Personal Journals,” *Ensign*, December 1980, p. 61). Three words that can mean so much: Be more Christlike!

The search for identity and purpose is fundamental to everyone. The scriptures are filled with events in the lives of those searching for answers to these fundamental questions. We read of the struggles of those who found false identity.

In Alma 1 we read of a man, “and his name was Nehor” (verse 15), “and he began to be

lifted up in the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel” (verse 6). And the people who found their identity in his false teachings “began to be proud” (verse 22). As those contentious people caused affliction to the Church, we read in Alma 1:24: “The hearts of many were hardened, and their names were blotted out, that they were remembered no more among the people of God.”

Alma himself recounts to his son Helaman his own search for identity: “For I went about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God; but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way” (Alma 36:6).

Alma had such remorse for the awful things he had done, he longed to be nonexistent. In his words, “Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body” (Alma 36:15). Then, as he continues to relate the torment he suffered remembering his sins, he said, “I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (verse 17). Alma was again in touch with his divine identity through a loving Savior. Speaking again to Helaman:

Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy.

Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there.

But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God. [Alma 36:21–23]

In the Church we learn about our identity very young in our families. In family home evening and in Primary we sing “I am a child of God.” Children strengthen their identity as

they learn to be nice, don't hit, help mommy; but it becomes more complex: say you're sorry, tell the truth, do your homework, forgive your brother, say your prayers.

As we grow and live and learn, as we love and serve one another, we understand how our choices, our behavior, help us become who we are. Alma warned his son Corianton that "wickedness never was happiness" (see Alma 41:10). He teaches him that the kind of person or the identity he develops in this life is the identity he will have in the Resurrection.

Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again.

For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored. [Alma 41:14–15]

Alma understood the change and the behavior that helps us develop our divine and eternal identity. Bruce R. McConkie spoke of the doctrine of the new birth:

There is a natural birth, and there is a spiritual birth. . . . The natural birth creates a natural man, and the natural man is an enemy to God. . . .

The spiritual birth comes after the natural birth. . . . It is to begin a new life, . . . a spiritual life. [Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985), p. 282]

For Alma, the change took place in a dramatic way. For many, it is a gradual change. Those changes in behavior can best be observed as we see good people become refined spiritually as they serve and sacrifice and honor eternal covenants.

Just prior to my first husband's death, he spoke in a ward conference. He told of a couple who had been coming to him as patients for twenty-five years. In the early years one would drop the other at the office and then run errands while the eye examination took place.

As years passed, each spouse would wait while the other was being examined. As more years passed, he noticed the wife was the driver, and she would assist her husband as he came into the office. Then they started coming to the examining room together. In time the wife started coming to the office alone. My husband inquired about her husband's health. She explained that she wasn't able to lift or care for him alone anymore and he was living in a rest home. She said, "I go every day, but I don't believe he even knows me. This morning I said, 'Clarence, do you know who I am?'" He studied her face carefully and then said, "No, but I know you're someone who loves me." Perhaps that is all that really matters. Are you recognized as one who loves others?

Life is about learning how to be more like our Savior, to strengthen our identity with Him. We learn to sacrifice our wants for the needs of others. We learn to love as He loved.

Our prophets have said there is only one name under heaven whereby man can be saved. It is the name of Jesus Christ (see D&C 18:23).

Does changing my name make me a different person? I want to be a better person. Marriage gives me new opportunity to love, share, and serve; but changing my name was also a reminder of the importance of a name and the blessing of His name, the name of Jesus Christ. Each one of us through the Atonement can leave behind that identity that would hold us back or tear us down. We can repent, forgive, forget. We can strengthen our identity with our Heavenly Father as we change and as we serve. There are many characteristics in the scriptures that distinguish

a righteous people—those who take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ.

Do any of you experience feelings of trauma or self-doubt when you are going through times of change—a new school year, a new job, a mission? There is great opportunity that comes with change. That is the way the gospel works in our lives. We have the opportunity to change, to become better, to strengthen our identity with our Heavenly Father. Perhaps this year will be a significant time for you to strengthen your identity in good ways.

As we each consider our own names, I believe the scriptures will be a helpful guide: “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches” (Proverbs 22:1).

The Savior warned of those who would have a false identity.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Ye shall know them by their fruits. . . .

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. . . .

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

[Matthew 7:15–16, 18, 20]

As we strengthen our identity with our Heavenly Father, it is important that we revere the name of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. [Exodus 20:7]

As we follow the teachings of our Heavenly Father, it is important that we respect and revere the names of one another. I read a study by the National School Safety Center. The center’s executive director, Ronald G. Stephens, stated that “fourth-through-12th graders around the nation . . . mentioned name-calling, cursing or staring . . . as the most common triggers for violence” (quoted in Ellen Graham,

“Language of Childhood: No Expletives Deleted,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 July 1995, p. B-1).

The old saying “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me” is probably not true. We should use respectful names and respect the proper names of others. Our Heavenly Father would expect that of us. As the Lord has told us, He will not hold those guiltless who take His name in vain. The Lord has also told us that he will not forsake those that know his name and trust in him (see Psalms 9:9–10).

Surely our Heavenly Father could recognize us as His children if our behavior resembled those who believe on His name.

In Moroni we read:

And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end.

And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.

[Moroni 6:3–4]

The changing of a name is symbolic. The change in us must be real. As we strengthen our identity with our Heavenly Father, surely it will be evident in our behavior.

President Hinckley has spoken to us regarding our divine identity. He has said:

You are [sons and daughters] of God, each of you, endowed with something of his divinity. It is a part of your eternal nature. You cannot afford to live beneath that portion of divinity. . . .

You will not need to be reminded to be virtuous, you will not need to be reminded to be clean, if

*you will remember always that you are [sons and daughters] of God, that a portion of his divinity is within you, and that you must make an accounting to him. [Gordon B. Hinckley, *The Wonderful Thing That Is You and the Wonderful Good You Can Do* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), pp. 3, 8]*

May we remember as we partake of the sacrament each Sunday the great blessing it is to take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ. Listen to the words that we covenant with our Eternal Father:

That [we] are willing to take upon [us] the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given [us], that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us]. [Moroni 4:3]

May we strengthen our identity with our Heavenly Father and remember that we have taken upon ourselves the name of His Son in His prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.