

Keeping Our Spiritual Wells Flowing

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I am delighted to be here today to share some experiences and feelings with each of you. I do appreciate Brother Hurtado's rendition of "I Am a Child of God" and will talk more of that topic later. This is certainly a humbling experience to stand before you and discuss feelings of the heart. It is both an honor and a challenge to speak during this devotional time set aside on our campus to focus on the things of the Spirit. Would each of you say a prayer in your heart that what I have to say will touch you and bring you closer to the Savior.

I wish to direct my remarks to "keeping our spiritual wells flowing." If each of you does a personal evaluation today, how would you score on a scale of 1 to 10 at living the gospel to the fullest? If you are like me, you have varying successes, depending on the day. It is my goal today to help all of us come closer to our Father in Heaven through living gospel principles.

There is a story of a man traveling across desert terrain who saw a road that looked as if it would be a shortcut. A posted road sign warned against traveling on it because it had no services available. The man decided to take the road anyway. After a time, in the extreme heat, his car stopped in the middle of the desert. Off in the distance the man thought he

saw a grouping of houses, and he hoped that help could be found there. After he had walked for some time, he realized that it was farther than he had anticipated. He kept walking in the hot sun until he reached the ghost town. No one could be found; only a few old buildings survived. In the middle of the town the man saw a water pump. He rushed over and quickly started to pump the old rusty handle to get whatever water was available. Nothing happened. As he looked down, he saw a metal can with a piece of paper in it, bearing scrawled handwriting. The note said there was a bottle of water under a rock nearby, and if all the water was poured into the pump hole the well would flow forth with abundance.

The man had come to the decisive moment. Should he choose to drink the only water available and not prime the pump, or should he put the water into the pump so the well would flow again? His lack of faith would not allow him to put the water in the well. Instead he drank the last bottle of water and staggered off, hoping that someone would find him and

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leaving the next person who found the well with no chance for water.

I feel this is much like the decisions we make daily. We must decide whether we will fill our spiritual wells with things of the Spirit—thereby saving ourselves and others—or draw, draw, draw from our wells, never filling them with more light and knowledge and finally not reaching the spirituality that we could.

Each of us has our own well to replenish. How do we keep our spiritual wells flowing? It is by building a strong testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and of our Heavenly Father. Each day should bring opportunities to build upon our existing testimony and to fortify to a greater degree our belief in the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our testimony of the gospel is one of our most precious possessions. It will bring us closer to our Savior and guide our thoughts and actions. A testimony is of the utmost importance. In Moroni 10:1–7 we find the formula for receiving a testimony. These scriptures tell how to gain a testimony about the Book of Mormon, but it is a formula that can be followed to build a testimony about any gospel principle. First, *read* and *study* about the principle. Second, *ponder* the ideas in your heart to receive a feeling. Third, *put* yourself in a frame of mind where you can accept the will of your Father. Fourth, *strive* for a sincere heart, having real intent and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Fifth, *ask* God in the name of Jesus Christ if the knowledge pondered is true. Sixth, *recognize* the promptings and feelings manifest to you by the Holy Ghost. Each of us chooses to strengthen our testimonies on a daily basis.

With regard to individual testimony, President Harold B. Lee said:

The strength of this Church is not to be measured by the amount of money paid as tithing by the faithful members, nor by the total membership of the Church, nor by the number of chapels or temple

buildings. The real strength of the Church is to be measured by the individual testimonies to be found in the total membership of the Church. [Mexico City Area Conference, 25–27 August 1972, p. 117]

As a professor in the Department of Dance, I have had many wonderful opportunities for my personal testimony to grow as I have traveled all over the world to share the universal language of dance. It has also been my privilege to see dedicated and humble students at Brigham Young University—who are part of our performing companies—govern their lives with sound gospel principles and shine as a light unto the world. As we tour, we are often hosted by sponsors in each country who have never heard of the gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but the light that shines from the eyes of our students as they perform on stage always attracts attention and brings questions from our viewers. Why are these students so happy? Why do they seem to be so close as a group and care for each other? Why do they have such a sense of self? Why would they spend their individual time to come to some of these remote places and share their talents? All the answers to these questions are tied to gospel principles.

The touring program at the university is designed to bring the gospel message to people all across the globe through talents of music, song, and dance. Regarding talent, President Joseph F. Smith said, “Every son and every daughter of God has received some talent, and each will be held to strict account for the use or misuse to which it is put” (“The Returned Missionary,” *Juvenile Instructor*, 15 November 1903, p. 689). We are each responsible to develop our talents and use them to help further the Lord’s work. Through the talent of dance, we are able to become closer to others. As these young students tour, they are able to share their testimonies three ways: verbally; by example as they live with these kind people

who are their hosts; and artistically as they perform on stage and display their God-given talents. As each of us on the tour shares testimonies and talents, our spirits are also fed by the many Saints and individuals we meet around the world.

Let me relate such a story. As I was touring with the International Folk Dancers as a performer many years ago, with founder and director Mary Bee Jensen, I stayed in a modest apartment in Sweden with a middle-aged couple with two children. Their home was of humble means, but they radiated a special spirit of love toward us because we were all members of the Church. I had told the sister how much I admired her beautiful old concert piano. She shared with me that they would soon not have the piano. It had been an heirloom in the family from her parents. All her other brothers and sisters had wanted the piano, but her parents had left it to her because she played so beautifully. When I asked why she would soon not have the piano, she said, “We have a buyer for it, and we are going to use the money to go to the Swiss temple to be sealed for time and all eternity and be able for one week to do work for the dead.” The value of the temple experience far outweighed the worth of the precious piano for this dear sister. It was a sacrifice for her whole family, but a worthwhile one.

What a lesson this was for me. I have often thought back to that experience, and I always feel a deep sense of appreciation for the opportunity I have to visit temples all over the world and to go within their hallowed halls. Living here in Provo, we can be to eight temples within two hours’ driving time: the Logan, Ogden, Bountiful, Salt Lake, Jordan River, Mount Timpanogos, Provo, and Manti temples. Only the St. George Temple is farther than two hours away. On November 2, 1997, we will have the Vernal Temple dedicated, our tenth temple in Utah. It will service more than 36,000 Saints in the area. What a blessing! The Vernal

Temple will be the 51st operating temple of the Church. There will then be 27 temples in the United States and 24 spread throughout the world. We are a “temple-going” people. These temples will help strengthen our testimonies and bring us closer to our ancestors and to God.

Our prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, has said:

Each temple built by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints stands as an expression of the testimony of this people that God our Eternal Father lives, that He has a plan for the blessing of His sons and daughters of all generations. [“This Peaceful House of God,” Ensign, May 1993, p. 74]

Last summer as I was touring with the International Folk Dancers on a professional development leave, we all had the experience of meeting with the temple president in Stockholm, Sweden, where the Saints of the Church in 1985 had their temple dedicated. He shared with us the fact that their temple district is very large. They have members come from as far away as Siberia, Russia—five long days of travel from the temple. These visitors have little means, and so the Saints in the area help house and care for them. The temple presidency sets aside the time for the Russian Church members to do work for a week and conduct all sessions in the Russian language. What a unique and wonderful experience for all involved, but what a lot of sacrifice for these dear Saints who travel so far and for those who help host them as guests over long periods of time. Opportunities like these fill their spiritual wells. Surely we who live in this area who are worthy to visit the temple should appreciate more the closeness of our Father’s houses, where we can visit frequently and grow in wisdom, light, and truth.

There are many other ways to build our testimonies and sensitize our spirits: daily prayer, reading and studying the scriptures, attending our Sunday services, reading out of the best

books, following the promptings of the Spirit, serving others, striving to be a good example of gospel living, sharing our talents and gifts, attending the many uplifting firesides and devotionals on campus, treating our earthly bodies as temples, and following the counsel of our prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley. These are only just a few principles, but because all of us are so individual, we all need to work on various challenges. One gospel principle may be difficult for one person to follow, and another principle may be more challenging for someone else. The important fact, however, is that we are diligently working to strengthen our testimony in those areas where we would most benefit. If we are to build our testimonies, we cannot do it without the help of the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost should be our closest companion. He is a member of the Godhead. The Godhead comprises Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. They are unified in purpose, but each has an important responsibility concerning the plan of salvation. Our Heavenly Father is our Father and ruler, Christ is our brother and Savior, and the Holy Ghost is the revealer and testifier of all truth. Even though he is a spirit, he has the form and likeness of a man. He can only be in one place at one time, but his influence can be felt everywhere at the same time. Because he has no body, he can dwell in us to help guide and direct us in paths of righteousness. He is our Heavenly Father's messenger and is a sacred gift to us.

In Moroni 10:5 we read: "And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things." What a promise! It is through the Holy Ghost that we know that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ and our Savior, and that the Church has been restored in these latter days. The Holy Ghost helps us to fulfill our divine potential and sanctifies us to prepare to meet God one day. He purifies our hearts so we no longer wish to be partakers of evil. He will be

with us only on his terms, however. If we do not strive to obey the commandments of God and keep our thoughts and actions pure, we will not have this wonderful spiritual power to help us. Joseph Fielding Smith said:

When a man has the manifestation from the Holy Ghost, it leaves an indelible impression on his soul, one that is not easily erased. It is Spirit speaking to spirit, and it comes with convincing force. A manifestation of an angel, or even of the Son of God himself, would impress the eye and mind, and eventually become dimmed, but the impressions of the Holy Ghost sink deeper into the soul and are more difficult to erase. [Answers to Gospel Questions, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1954–56), 2:151]

The Holy Ghost can temporarily guide a person without that person receiving the "gift of the Holy Ghost," but the guidance will not continue unless one is baptized and confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and then only if one lives worthily. Having the Holy Ghost as our constant companion brings peace to our hearts and minds and allows us to understand the things of God.

I remember an incident when the Holy Ghost guided me as I was touring last summer to Scandinavia. The International Folk Dance Ensemble was to give a fireside for our last evening in Finland before we left for Saint Petersburg, Russia, the next morning, where we would end the tour. We always appreciate the opportunity to share our testimonies, both in word and song, with the Saints we meet in the many areas we visit. Earlier that day we had been hosted by the American embassy in Finland. It was a pleasant encounter and an opportunity to let those there know about our beliefs and what we stand for. One of our leaders was carrying all of the tour funds because much money had been transferred to other

currency. Inadvertently the black case containing the money was left at a bus stop when all of the group jumped on for a quick transfer that would get us back in time for the fireside.

It was when we had reached another transfer that the black case was found missing. While the rest of the group went to the chapel, the leader quickly retraced connections, only to find the bag missing. We were all downhearted and worried because the Russian officials would not allow us to finish the tour without our own funding. We sought out a room in the ward house and knelt while a prayer was offered in our behalf. We were indeed a somber group.

After we left the room, a member of the Church who knew about the loss asked me what we would do. I said without hesitation, "The case will be found and all will be well." I had such a calm feeling. I knew that our Father in Heaven was watching over us. For me, however, this was not a normal response. Losing that much money anywhere in the world would be disastrous.

We went on to ready ourselves for the fireside as planned, but just as we were about to proceed, a man came to find the leader who had lost the bag. The man reported that a black case had been found and turned into the police, who had seen the USA address and called the American embassy where we had just been hosted. The embassy personnel had called us, knowing where we were expected to be that evening. Two young boys of about 13 or 14 found the bag and turned it in when they saw how much money there was. They might have been afraid that it was gang related. As is customary in Finland, a certain percentage of any money found is due the finders. What a small price the \$500 given to the boys was compared to how penniless we would have been. Within a five-hour period, all factors had fallen into place to find and return the money we so badly needed. This truly was a miracle.

As I said, the Holy Ghost confirmed to my mind throughout this ordeal that all would be

well. What a blessing to have the Holy Ghost to guide and lead us daily. He has given me answers and helped calm my spirit many times, such as when we were at checkpoints in Russia and our guides were not allowed to meet us to help with the crossing—yet we cleared in record time; or the time our costumes were held in customs and we had a show that evening and needed the authorities of the country to soften their attitudes and help us—and they did; or the time in South America when a small temple housing unit had to accommodate us for a week because our previous contract had fallen through—but all the right connections were still made. The Holy Ghost helped us in each instance. He is only waiting for us to ask in righteousness and faith for the support we often need.

To keep our spiritual wells full, we need to give of our waters. The Lord counts on us to be his servants. King Benjamin wrote in Mosiah 2:17, "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God." Because we are all blessed with so much, especially here in this land of freedom and opportunity, we must make service our trademark. One can feel the spirit of those who continually serve when help is needed. They have a certain love, caring, and spirit about them. I like the way Sister Chieko Okazaki feels about service: "Service is the signature . . . of the Savior. . . . In nothing do we resemble the Savior more than in serving others" (Chieko Okazaki, *Aloha!* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1995], pp. 84–85). The Savior was the perfect example of service. His mission was to come to earth to serve others and give his life for us. While he was on the earth he served the ignorant, poor, sinful, and despised. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead, and taught the gospel to all who would follow him.

Even though he was our God, Savior, and Lord of this earth, he always performed acts of humble service. We must follow his example. In service we find ourselves becoming less

selfish, more able to love, and having more joy. Our own problems seem less serious, and we are on the road to gaining eternal life. There are many ways to serve others. We can help physically, socially, economically, and spiritually. Throughout our lifetimes, all of us will need help from others. We have often heard it said that it is usually through another person that God meets our needs. We must be his servants.

What have you done today in the way of service to another? Have you been the Lord's missionary for good? Have you put others' needs above your own? I have found that the more you give to others, the more it all seems to come back in full measure. Sister Okazaki counsels us to concentrate on the joy of service, not on the "job." We need not set unrealistic expectations upon ourselves, but we can find a balance of what we can give. We alone must choose. It is like the story I began with: If we have faith to keep filling our own spiritual wells, we will have the resources and desire to help others to fill theirs.

I truly believe we come closer to and more like our Savior and Father in Heaven through service. About two years ago the counselor in the stake presidency of the Sunset Heights Stake came to visit me one evening. We had just moved to a small house while our other home was being built, to be completed in March. It was just after Christmas. My daughter had announced that she had accepted a proposal and wished to marry in March. Some of you know well that getting a wedding ready for a bride is no small task. I still needed to prepare a national conference presentation for the last of March and had my regular heavy load as a faculty member for winter semester. The counselor wanted me to serve as the director of a stake dance festival for the youth focused on the Israeli culture. You guessed it—it was at the end of March. I knew a number of Israeli dances that would fit the occasion and felt I could do this calling because of my background, but now was not the time. I had too much to do!

He told me to think about it. I did for about two minutes, then said, "I'll do my best. I have had too many blessings from the Lord to shortchange him now." I have never had any calling in the Church that went so smoothly. Leaders were called from all of the wards to help me teach the dances to the youth, others helped with the facilities and equipment, parents and ward members helped with costumes, and the dance festival came off wonderfully. I learned a very important lesson again: the Lord does want us to serve where we are chosen, and he will help those who serve him if they are willing and faithful. I still have young people and leaders mention their fond memories of the festival. I even now draw from this experience to keep my own spiritual well full.

Sometimes service can actually save the lives and the spirits of others. While I was in Sweden last summer, I had a sister tell me of a story of service she and others had performed for an orphanage in Russia. The story has been written in the book entitled *To Rejoice as Women*, written by Veronika Ekelund. I would like to tell a very short version.

When the Relief Society had its sesquicentennial anniversary not long ago, sisters from all over the world were challenged to do significant acts of service for their community. When they found how much the children were in need, the Handen Ward in Stockholm, Sweden, decided to direct their attention to the plight of the poor in a Russian orphanage in Syktyvkar. It was far from Stockholm. To get there from Moscow took 26 hours on a train. Bishop Rydgren approved the project just as long as all ward members participated. They found that the children in the orphanage had to take shifts going to school because they lacked the warm clothing necessary. When the Swedish ward learned this, everyone in the ward wanted to donate warm clothing and any other items that would benefit the children. The response of the Saints was overwhelming. They gave a refrigerator, two sewing machines, clothes, tools,

dishes, shoes, skis, ice skates, toys, and more. There was so much that they wondered how they could transport all of the items. The estimated cost of \$30,000 was too high for chartering a plane and the drive was too far (about as far as from Salt Lake City to Mexico City). It would also have been dangerous, due to off-limits military regions and bandits who would do anything to gain the goods. It looked as if the project would die after all.

After much prayer and searching, a friend, Svetlana, was found in Moscow, and the goods were shipped to her in 258 boxes. They needed to be guarded, and as is usually the case, the right forms releasing them to her were not there. After managing to obtain the signed forms, she finally persuaded the customs office to let her take the boxes. Then began the difficult work of transporting the goods by train to Syktyvkar.

What an ordeal! The Swedish Relief Society president and her husband, Ingrid and Mats, who went with Svetlana, were overjoyed when they saw the 65 children and 15 leaders at the orphanage receive the boxes. Many of the children had no parents, or their parents were ill, mentally disabled, or imprisoned or had abandoned them. The donated items brought great pleasure to all the recipients.

The children in turn presented a special program of dance, song, and drama. In Russia the arts are an established part of their culture, and this was their way of saying "Thank you." That reunion had brought much happiness. The husband and wife returned to Sweden with loving stories to tell all of the ward. The joy did not stop there, however. The ward decided to bring all the children and leaders to Stockholm for Christmas. What an undertaking! They needed visas, transportation, and special care. All was worked out after much preparation, and the children arrived on December 26. The Saints were able to share their homes and testimonies with their newly found friends. The Spirit brought all closer

together. A local hospital donated its services to help 10 of the children with eye exams. They found that two of the children who were wearing glasses didn't need them, and others needed stronger lenses. Some had bleeding sores on the bridges of their noses because of the heavy glasses they had been wearing. What a difference the lightweight glasses made.

After the children left, there was a great deal of joy. The members knew that the children would be much better off for the experience. Jekaterina, one of the leaders at the orphanage, said upon their return:

When we have dark days here . . . and I can assure you, at times it feels like we cannot go on, I gather the children around me and we talk about our friends in Sweden. We talk about all you have done for us, and in particular, the joy that radiates when you smile. We believe that joy comes from your faith. Please, give us your smiles. And your faith.

[Veronika Ekelund, "From Nauvoo to Russia: The Reach of Relief Society," in *To Rejoice as Women: Talks from the 1994 Women's Conference* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1994], p. 175]

This ward in Sweden did truly perform a miracle, one that will be remembered by many for years to come. Those members are an example to all of us when it comes to unselfish service and filling others' spiritual and physical wells. I requested the opening song today to be "I Am a Child of God," sung in three different languages, because I believe every one of us truly is his child. I am the Sunset Heights Fourth Ward Primary senior chorister at the present time. Last summer, before I left on my Scandinavian tour, I taught the children the song "I Am a Child of God" in English, Spanish, and Russian. They had fun learning it, and I had hoped they would have more of a connection with their international brothers and sisters in the Church. By the end of the teaching time, they had learned the different

languages of the song better than I had. I loved to hear them sing the song with much conviction and love.

I was in for a big surprise while attending a Sunday service in Norway. Our BYU group was with the youth of the ward in a room where a number of the dancers shared their testimonies. I was sitting on the back row next to the wall. Suddenly I heard a faint familiar sound in the room next to me. It was the Primary children singing “I Am a Child of God” in Norwegian. What an unexpected treat for me. It brought tears to my eyes to know that we are truly all children of our Father in Heaven and that he loves us whoever we are.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is an international church. I never would have believed that by this time in my life there would be more members of the Church living outside the United States than within. We may live in Africa, Asia, Europe, or the Americas, but a loving Father in Heaven will never let us stray and has provided a way to return to live with him forever. It is indeed our own choice, one that will affect the eternities.

I love the hymn we all sang in opening—
“Choose the Right” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 239):

*Choose the right when a choice is placed before you.
In the right the Holy Spirit guides;
And its light is forever shining o’er you,
When in the right your heart confides.*

*Choose the right! Let no spirit of digression
Overcome you in the evil hour.*

*There’s the right and the wrong to ev’ry question;
Be safe thru inspiration’s pow’r.*

*Choose the right! There is peace in righteous doing.
Choose the right! There’s safety for the soul.
Choose the right in all labors you’re pursuing;
Let God and heaven be your goal.*

*Choose the right! Choose the right!
Let wisdom mark the way before.
I**n its light, choose the right!
And God will bless you evermore.*

In summary, it is my prayer that we will choose to keep our testimonies growing, follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost, and render service to others.

I have a firm testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and my Father in Heaven that I cannot take for granted. I have been blessed greatly because of this knowledge and feel it a wonderful blessing to serve here at this university with all of its opportunities to truly become a follower of our Savior. I know that the Church was restored by Joseph Smith in these the latter days, and I will be ever grateful for the spirit of the Holy Ghost that sustains me and directs my path. We are all children of a loving Father: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). It is my prayer that each of you will fill your wells and keep them flowing to serve others as you try to become more like our Savior, Jesus Christ. I say this in his name. Amen.