

The Sacred Matters

RANDAL D. DAY

I appreciate this opportunity very much. I am grateful for my loving wife of nearly 41 years, who is sitting near me on the stand today. She is a pillar of great strength in all that we do. I also acknowledge the attendance of family and friends and appreciate their support.

I was reflecting on the many special occasions I have experienced here in this building. My wife and I with our infant son moved here to BYU in January of 1971—nearly 40 years ago. The Marriott Center was just being completed at that time, and we were able to attend some of those early meetings and basketball games.

One of my fondest Marriott Center memories is the dedication of the Provo Temple in 1972. President Joseph Fielding Smith was presiding—we sat right about there, two-thirds of the way up. At the conclusion of that ceremony, with our white handkerchiefs in hand, thousands of young student voices sang “The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning.” The Spirit of God was burning that day as we raised our voices in the glorious shout that concludes every dedication.

In like manner, I remember the quiet reverence of not too many months ago when we watched President Gordon B. Hinckley come through the portal right over there,

waving his cane at us with fun in his eyes. That too was a time of deep emotion and connection with the Spirit.

Several years ago I was immersed in one of my favorite callings in the Church: I was working with the youth. On one outing we were deep in the middle of a several-day rafting trip on the Grande Ronde River in the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness of northeastern Oregon. After a long stretch of rapids and splashing each other’s boats, we stopped for a rest, and the Varsity Scouts were anxious to run wild. As they began to run up the steep hillside, my co-Scout leader yelled at them with his best drill sergeant’s voice: “STOP!” Surprisingly, two or three of them actually did stop, which I found amazing. He said, “Look around you.” They looked and shrugged with a look of blank indifference. Then he said, “You are standing in the middle of a large patch of poison oak.” Suddenly, the world looked very different to them. What had before been harmless brush now became dangerous, vivid, and brilliant. Their training about three shiny leaves jumped out at them in dazzling reality.

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We have been asked to take a risky journey and plunge ourselves deep into the foliage of the world, and we are attempting to do so while avoiding the toxins that irritate and can potentially destroy the sensitive skin of our souls. The Savior said, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but . . . ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world” (John 15:19).

We often like to summarize the Savior’s counsel and claim that we are in the world but not of the world. In a recent book by Charles Taylor entitled *A Secular Age*, the author suggests that society has transformed: we have shifted from a time within which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God to a time when the idea of God is, at best, elective. That is, we live in a time of ideological choice and preference. Today is a time within which faith, even for some devoted believers, is only a shaky possibility. We live in a unique era during which we are attempting to raise our families and transmit to them vital gospel themes and ideals, while we are concurrently bombarded by the deafening, pounding, and throbbing heartbeat of a secular age.

The primary point of my remarks today is to suggest that as we negotiate the challenging and dangerous paths of this life, we can draw on the power of the sacred, holy, divine, awe-inspiring, sanctified, and hallowed. And by doing so, there is value added: the strategies of the world can help us to achieve much of which is good, but when we add the power of the sacred to our lives, we are likely to acquire a distinctive and enhanced result that is stunning and even breathtaking.

One potentially toxic premise of a secular age is the notion of “flaming individualism.” As a scripture says:

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, . . . disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

Without natural affection, . . . despisers of those that are good,

. . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.
[2 Timothy 3:2–4]

While we scoff at those who once believed that the earth was the center of the universe, with sun and stars revolving around it, our world now teaches that *you* are the center of the universe. From this outlook everything is designed to make you personally happy, meet your desires, and convince us that life is about deserving the best. In a 1990 conference address, Elder Neal A. Maxwell described the attributes of personal selfishness:

We see in ourselves other familiar forms of selfishness: accepting or claiming undeserved credit; puffing deserved credit; being glad when others go wrong; resenting the genuine successes of others; preferring public vindication to private reconciliation; and taking “advantage of one because of his words.” (2 Ne. 28:8.) All things are thus viewed selfishly—what are their implications for “me,” much like the mattress on the highway which delayed traffic. When frustrated motorists finally got around the mattress, none stopped to remove it, because now there was nothing in it for him.

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “Mankind [is] naturally selfish, ambitious, and striving to excel one above another.” (The Words of Joseph Smith, comp. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 1980, p. 201.) [“Put Off the Natural Man, and Come Off Conqueror,” Ensign, November 1990, 14]

In 2002, returning to the same theme, Elder Neal Maxwell declared:

Ultimate consecration is the yielding up of oneself to God. Heart, soul, and mind were the encompassing words of Christ in describing the first commandment, which is constantly, not periodically, operative (Matt. 22:37). If kept, then our performances will, in turn, be fully consecrated for the lasting welfare of our souls (see 2 Ne. 32:9).

["Consecrate Thy Performance," *Ensign*, May 2002, 36]

The consecration that Elder Maxwell speaks of promotes the impression of a community of Saints bound together by love for one another, within which competition and rivalry are subdued. Such a community would also seek to diminish the gain ethic, discourage personal ambition, and promote activities that enhance the lasting welfare of our souls.

As we begin to think about the contrast between that which is sacred and that which is secular, I am reminded of the story of Joseph Smith, who for several years returned to the Hill Cumorah in attempts to secure the plates. Each time he was told that he wasn't ready. Moroni explained to Joseph that before he could receive the plates he must purify his soul and must not think upon the plates as having monetary worth.

When we view any activity, whether it be schoolwork, choosing a partner in marriage, leading or teaching in the Church, or whatever we engage in, we can see our "plates of gold" either with regard to their weight or with regard to their text and impact. If we think upon the weight of the gold, our results will become mundane, common, and shallow at best. However, when we see beyond the weight of the gold and look at the text on the plates through the sacred stones of the seer, then a vista of eternity is open to us.

Our primary resources in life are our time, our talents, our possessions, and our space. When we see those resources through the eyes of the world, we see only the weight of the gold and focus on selfishness and even on hoarding our resources for self-use. When we see the resources at hand through the eyes of the seer stone, then we see instead the power of consecration.

I have an example of how this works. I share the following story without the permission of my wife, Larri-Lea. I hope to get her

permission shortly after this presentation at lunch—and I can say without a doubt that I am in serious trouble.

When we moved here in 1999, one of the key features of making the decision to come to BYU from another university was the opportunity for Larri-Lea to finish her undergraduate schooling. Her degree had been shelved and rerouted for many years as we raised our five children. Soon after we arrived at BYU, she began taking classes. The courses were sometimes challenging, but the joy in her eyes that came from being here on campus was marvelous to see: she loved it with all her heart (except for accounting).

In the fall and winter of 2001 and 2002, my mother became ill with cancer. At that time, my parents lived in Oregon and accessibility was difficult. It became clear, however, that extended assistance was needed. Without much fanfare—but with a great deal of determination—Larri-Lea quickly volunteered to go to my mother's bedside and be with her during the long weeks of her illness until her death. Again, without whining or complaint, she simply unenrolled from her classes and consecrated her most valuable resource—herself—to the care of my mother during those months of illness.

The more harsh versions of secular family life would suggest that when women take on care responsibilities and are not equally employed and contributing to personal self-enhancement, they are being taken advantage of. From the sacred point of view, Larri-Lea knew that her greatest and most important contribution was to provide loving care to a family member in need. We talked frequently about our consecrated responsibilities and what was needed at the time. I tried very hard not to insist, push, or demand that she stay and be a daily part of my life; nor did I pressure her to go to my mother's side. Instead, our discussions focused on consecration, sacred responsibilities, and what was best for that situation

at that time for our family. The story does not end.

Later that year, after my mother's death, Larri-Lea did return to school for a short time, only to discover that her own mother was dying from cancer, also in Oregon. I remember the hot August day when we were purchasing a used car. The conversation again turned to consecration. We concluded that what was needed was not a car for our personal gratification (and we found one that was a beauty), but one that would be economical and dependable, get good gas mileage, have four doors, and could assist Larri-Lea in this second errand of mercy. In other words, because of our knowledge of and belief in the sacred, the decision was transformed, and we saw the choice through different eyes.

Once again Larri-Lea abandoned her beloved studies and made the long journey to southern Oregon several times over the following year, staying for weeks at a time to care for her mother. Her mother died in the spring 2005—thousands of miles were logged on the car—thousands of hours of selfless consecrated service were given.

Once again Larri-Lea started classes, but interruptions and diversions continued to slow her down. During this time she was called to serve as the Relief Society president in our ward. The schooling was again shelved.

In the summer of 2009, she was considering again reentering school with the goal of finishing her degree. But once again an unexpected family crisis intervened. With some discouragement that soon changed into resolve, she put her notebooks back on the shelf as she became primary caretaker for our two grandchildren who now live with us along with their mother. Through the lens of the sacred, choices were made and adjustments were put in place.

She is a wonderful, loving grandmother, who has made a huge difference in the lives of these two beautiful children. No wonder some of our family members refer to Larri-Lea as

St. Lea. And with that last comment, I am now seriously in the doghouse.

This short story illuminates clearly how turning toward and employing a sacred principle can strengthen and enhance the quality of daily family life. I hasten to add that I am not necessarily proposing that all women should abandon their education or careers to do such service. And I am not suggesting that only LDS women and men make those kinds of Christlike decisions. However, I do believe that, for many of us, seeing the world through a sacred lens means that decisions we make will be transformed into something better and more powerful when we see them through sacred eyes.

When Larri-Lea saw this dilemma through a sacred lens, I know the words of King Benjamin came to her mind, when he declared that when we are in the service of our fellow man (and women and children) we are in the service of God (see Mosiah 2:17).

As an aside, we talked a few days ago about Larri-Lea reentering school the upcoming winter term. My first thought was to wonder which family member was going to need help next.

My next example of how the sacred matters comes from my study of family conflict. From a research point of view, family science researchers have been studying the nature of family conflict for many years. I am currently the project director for a large-scale study of about 700 families living here in Utah County and in Washington State. Each year for the past four years our research team, including a small army of undergraduates, has spent its summers in the homes of each of these families as we record and track their progress, problems, strengths, and challenges. One of the areas we track is family conflict. We note in our research that when marital conflict is high, so is an imbalance of power in families. Children are less likely to report that their family members are kind to one another, and the amount of relational aggression soars. Relational aggression is when

one partner says of the other: “When we are not getting along, he ignores me when he is angry” or “She withholds affection when angry” or “She tries to get others to take sides with her, to get them upset also.”

From a family science point of view, this is a serious issue and one that should be addressed. In our sample of families, both in Utah and in Washington, about a third of our couples struggled with moderate to fairly high levels of marital conflict. This is not unusual compared to other data about conflict, but it is troubling nonetheless. From a typical research point of view, we care about this issue because we know that often couple conflict leads to marital breakdown, it can frequently escalate to emotional and/or physical abuse, and it has significant effects on how children see the world, on how trusting they are, on how secure they feel, and even on their school performance.

For just a moment, however, let’s turn away from thinking about this topic from a typical secular research viewpoint and consider the same issue from a sacred lens.

Think of the talk Elder Dallin H. Oaks gave in conference last week about the struggles Joseph had when he was translating the Book of Mormon. During his translating efforts, he was having a tiff with Emma. Some type of conflict arose and words were exchanged. The result was that he could not continue translation until that issue had been resolved.

Principle: When contention is high, the Spirit cannot reside with us, and the sacred lens goes dark.

Think of the scripture in Revelations 2:17:

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith . . . [to] him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Like Joseph the translator and communicator with God, we too can be given the “white

stone” so that we can see past the gibberish of this world and into the majesty of eternity.

When the Spirit is with us, and we begin to receive the hidden manna, our decisions are more powerful—or directions are clearer—and our confidence is stronger. Brothers and sisters, we need the manna from God each day; it cannot be stored for future use, and it is vital for daily survival. That is particularly true when considering the trials and problems that face us in daily family life. In short, we need our daily manna—our daily bread—in the form of strokes of ideas that come from high.

Joseph said once, as recorded in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, that:

A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus. [Teachings, 151]

So, a key way we can solve problems in families is by having strokes of ideas that will help us learn from the Spirit, and those ideas will take us well beyond our common understanding.

Now let’s connect conflict to this issue. It turns out that we are much less likely to receive those ideas when there is conflict, intimidation, compulsion, coercion, contention, strife, control, and domination. Think of the Savior’s words in 3 Nephi and consider this inspired counsel:

There shall be no disputations among you. . . .

For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up

the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away. [3 Nephi 11:28–30]

Notice also that this pronouncement was one of the very first things that the Savior said to the people after He descended and walked among them. It is as if He were saying:

Unless you stop the contention, conflict, strife, control, and intimidation, I cannot be with you. If I am not with you, the Spirit will withdraw, the manna will cease, and the strokes of ideas will not come. You will be left on your own to spiritually starve.

This sacred view of power, conflict, and contention is further illuminated in Doctrine and Covenants 121:35–46. We note that the three defining and deadly elements of destructive relationships are control, dominion, and compulsion. By contrast, the Lord gives us His relationship manna on the other side of the page. Relationships are enhanced, decisions are stronger, and confidence is boosted when we approach others with genuine love, patience, persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, and meekness (see D&C 121:39).

In contrast to a relationship that is bathed in the gentle manna of kindness, patience, persuasion, and tolerance is the destructive havoc that reigns from unrighteous control and compulsion, clearly illuminated by President Gordon B. Hinckley in a conference talk:

You cannot afford to do anything that would place a curtain between you and the ministering of angels in your behalf. [Think of the sudden strokes of ideas.]

You cannot be immoral in any sense. You cannot be dishonest. You cannot cheat or lie. You cannot take the name of God in vain or use filthy lan-

guage and still have the right to the ministering of angels. . . .

In the marriage companionship there is neither inferiority nor superiority. The woman does not walk ahead of the man; neither does the man walk ahead of the woman. They walk side by side as a son and daughter of God on an eternal journey.

She is not your servant, your chattel, nor anything of the kind.

*How tragic and utterly disgusting a phenomenon is wife abuse. Any man in this Church who abuses his wife, who demeans her, who insults her, who exercises unrighteous dominion over her is unworthy to hold the priesthood. Though he may have been ordained, the heavens will withdraw, the Spirit of the Lord will be grieved, and it will be amen to the authority of the priesthood of that man. [“Personal Worthiness to Exercise the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 52–54]*

The connection, then, is complete. We need strokes of ideas that transcend our frail attempts. It is very unlikely that those ideas will come if we are embroiled in conflict. That view of conflict is not to be found nor understood in secular understanding.

What I am gesturing at in this talk is that the ideological position we begin with is the foundation from which everything else flows. From our worldview flows everything we are and all that we try to accomplish. When we move beyond the secular, we will find light and strength through our own “white stone” of personal revelation. With that power, we will be given access to divine and astonishing secrets at every turn.

For me there is no more vivid image than the one suggested by a passage in the book of Helaman:

And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when

all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall. [Helaman 5:12]

I testify that the shafts *are* in the whirlwind: the hail and mighty storm is here. The forecast is for mighty storms, a deluge of worldly influence, complete with a tsunami of evil, with temperatures somewhere in the hundreds. Yes, there is a gulf of misery, and, no, this is not a metaphorical scare tactic. The effects are

real, the devastation is palpable, and misery is vast. Like the Scoutmaster in my first story, I am asking you to stop just for a minute and look around. Are you standing knee-deep in poison oak?

We can respond to the sting of this penetrating storm and strengthen our families by embracing a more sacred approach in all we do and by becoming worthy of the Second Comforter, even Jesus Christ, who will personally supply us with the “white-stone” revelation. I so testify in the holy name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom I know to be an ally and friend, and who is the Son of God, amen.