

On Feeling Inferior

PAUL H. DUNN

What a glorious sight! I welled up with pride as President Oaks brought to our attention the accomplishments of these great performing groups of athletes at this University. I have just returned from a tour of the South, where it was my privilege to be on two other university campuses, and the contrast here is terrific. Congratulations.

As I listened to President Oaks this morning, I could not help but think of an experience that occurred in my life a few years ago at the University of Southern California. I was the institute director there, and because of my close association with the school I was asked by the First Presidency to be the Latter-day Saint representative at a PTA congress that was being sponsored on campus. A number of great educators from throughout the United States were invited to participate also.

On the appointed day I attended an informal luncheon that the administration was putting on for the participants. I noticed that I was to be seated next to a full navy commander who had been one of the leaders in developing the testing program for the United States Navy. There were the usual place cards, and as we took our seats the navy commander turned to me and inquired, "Mr. Dunn, you're the Latter-day Saint, aren't you?"

I checked to see what was showing and I asked, "Well, yes, but how did you know?"

He said, "As we sat down, I noticed you weren't going to partake of that liquid." I had turned my coffee cup over.

"Well, that's right," I said, "but I know a lot of people who aren't of my faith that don't partake of that particular liquid. Why would that tell you?"

"Oh," he explained, "it's the way you turned your cup over. You have that Mormon twist in your wrist."

I immediately started to defend our position—as we all do once in a while—and he said, "Look, I didn't inquire to get a defense of your position. I'd like to take this opportunity, sir, to salute you. May I do that?"

Well, a full navy commander wanting to salute a PFC? I was not about to stop him. I said, "Please, sir, go ahead."

He said, "I don't mean you personally. I'd like to take this opportunity to salute your

Paul H. Dunn was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 25 October 1977.

church, the group you represent here this morning."

I was interested. "Why would you single us out?"

He replied, "Mr. Dunn, in my official position I have an opportunity to travel throughout the whole of the earth and I watch people very, very carefully and I like what I see about your organization. I am convinced, sir, that the time will come when this country, this world, will look to you people for spiritual direction."

"Thank you, sir." The thrill went up and down my spine and I was grateful to be one of you. And I thank God this morning for the kind of example these great performers and athletes and you Latter-day Saints represent to the earth. God bless you.

It is not often that I get to travel with my wife. I am delighted to have her here. She is very special, as partners are. I hope she knows that. I am often reminded, however, of the experience a fellow had one time with his wife. It seems one morning he was backing his car out of the garage and it stalled. He got out, raised the hood, tinkered around trying to find the problem, and discovered a loose connection. It would require the help of another party, so he called his wife out. He said, "Now, dear, you get behind the wheel and when I give you the signal, turn on the ignition." She agreed.

He got his head under the hood. She slid behind the wheel and in doing so she leaned on the horn. Well, he came out of there as though it were the morning of the first resurrection, cracked his head on the hood, walked around rubbing it, and said, "How in the world can you be so beautiful and yet so dumb?"

To which she responded, "I'm beautiful so you would marry me and dumb so I would marry you." I appreciate that.

Quite often in my experience I have a chance to talk with you young people formally and informally. Many hundreds come to my office to share experiences and concerns, to ask

questions. I have noticed that if I could put most of the concerns young people have into two categories they would fall something like this: "Brother Dunn, how do you develop more faith and self-confidence?" and "How do you get the courage to do those things the Lord would have you do?" I would like to address myself briefly this morning to those two subjects.

I have noticed that daily we meet moments that steal our self-esteem. They are inevitable. Pick up any magazine; you see people who look healthier, skinnier, or better dressed than you are. Look around. There is always someone who seems smarter, another more self-assured, still another more talented. In fact, each day we are reminded that we lack certain talents, that we make mistakes, that we do not excel in all things. And amidst all this, it is easy to believe that we do not quite measure up in the great scheme of things, but are inferior in some secret way.

Underrating ourselves like this is not only painful but it is downright dangerous, for we limit the range of all possibility. We choke off our talents. And often we are dwelling on small faults of ours that, probably, others do not even notice.

"My nose is too big," a girl said to me the other day. "I'm much too fat." "I'm not very smart." "My clothes aren't right." How many of us let secret thoughts like these tear at our hearts? We are our own worst critics and believe others see us the same way.

I am reminded of the experience of a very pretty girl who would never go swimming; she would never put on a bathing suit. This was a great mystery to her friends until one day she confessed that she had been walking home from school in the second grade when an older boy came up behind her and said, "Look at those bowed legs. Have you ever seen such pins on a girl?" She never forgot the comment. And though everyone else thought her legs were straight and beautiful, she would never put on a bathing suit.

How easy it is to live as fear-haunted and defeated nobodies, magnifying our faults, fearing the eyes of others too closely put upon us. The truth of the matter is plain enough, according to Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of one of our presidents (whom, by the way, everybody remembers for her insight, not her protruding teeth). She said, "No one [listen to this, young people] can make you feel inferior without your consent (*Reader's Digest*, February 1963, p. 261). So why do we feel inferior? Why do we have to brood over seeming faults, real or imagined?

Maybe sometimes we need to step back and look at the forces that form our self-image, that powerful mental picture that determines just who we are. Do we judge ourselves too much on the physical? I think we sometimes overemphasize it. Do we judge ourselves on money, position, or glory? Remember, you great youth, favor and fortune are whimsical.

One college girl who spent all of her money on tuition did not have much left over for clothes, and she always felt bad because of the way she had to dress. But she had a positive mental attitude. She said, "I just go pull out magazine fashions from the 1940s and sit down and laugh. Everyone who thought they looked so chic then looks pretty funny."

Can you remember this very important formula in your life? I've shared it with you before: The greatest crisis given a little time is very humorous.

If you base your self-esteem, your feeling of self-worth, on anything outside the quality of your heart, your mind, or your soul, you have based it on a very shaky footing. So you and I are not perfect in form or physical figure? So you are not the richest, the wisest, the wittiest? So what? As Thomas Fuller once said, "What a day may bring a day may take away" (Richard L. Evans, *Richard Evan's Quote Book*, p. 56).

Do you remember the story of Sarah Bernhardt, the great actress? In later years she lived in an apartment high over Paris. An old

admirer climbed all of the stairs one day and asked her breathlessly, "Sarah, why do you live so high up?"

"Dear friend," she replied, "it is the only way I can still make the hearts of men beat faster" (*Reader's Digest*, June 1961, p. 217). Many people were drawn to this actress even in her old age, not because of outward show but because of her inward spirit.

Who are we really? That is the question each one of us must ask almost daily as we succeed or we fail, as we live with big noses or thin hair. The answer to that is a glorious one and this audience ought to know it and understand. We are literally the offspring of heavenly parents. Can you remember that? I know we think it up here [indicating head] but we have a little difficulty relating it in here [indicating chest]. He created us with great personal care. He is the artist; we are his masterpiece. Our hearts, our souls, our minds have potential beyond our greatest imagination. We can become anything we want if we just remember who we are and if we do not choke off our powers by brooding over some small fault or by feeling inferior.

Dr. Leslie D. Weatherhead said on one occasion

If we have in our minds a picture of ourselves as fear-haunted and defeated nobodies, we must get rid of that picture and hold up our heads. God sees us as men and women in whom and through whom He can do a great work. He sees us not as pathetic victims of life, but masters of the art of living, not wanting sympathy, but imparting help to others and therefore thinking less and less of ourselves. [Maxwell Maltz, *Psychocybernetics*, p. 45]

I personally thank God for great leaders, for parents, for teachers who have taught me these great truths, who have in a real sense imbued me with a sense of worth.

I may have shared this with some of you before. When I was a little boy growing up in

Arkansas, we were the only Latter-day Saints in the city of Little Rock for many, many years. (It was ironic; I went back the other day as a General Authority to reorganize the stake and the building sits on a plot of ground where I used to play ball as a little boy.) And I have thought many times how grateful I am for parents and teachers, even those not of my faith, who imbued in me a sense of worth in those early formative years of my life. Here is an example: When I was about twelve years old, planning what I thought was to be a great athletic career, I opened up the sport page one day and there was an announcement. It said, "New York Yankees to play two exhibition ball games in Little Rock." Keep in mind, young people, that in those days we did not have the winter leagues as we now have and there was no television. For a little boy of age twelve in Little Rock to see a major league game was impossible. Travel was completely restricted. Funds were just not available.

During the weeks before the New York Yankees came to Little Rock, I secured the position of bat boy for the local team. Out of forty-three applicants, somehow I got the job. You can appreciate the excitement this meant for me because this would put me on the ball field at the same time the Yankees would be practicing and performing.

On the morning of the occasion, I remember that I went out to Travelers Field and waited for the Yankee bus to come. The bus was due at nine; I arrived at six. I stood there with my hat and my glove and my little heart pounding because on the Yankee team was my favorite player, Lou Gehrig. Anything Lou Gehrig did I followed. During that same year I read about his diet. Lou Gehrig ate six eggs for breakfast and so did I. Lou Gehrig ate Wheaties for breakfast—or so the ad said—and so did I.

As the bus arrived and one by one the players got off, I stood there with my heart pounding, waiting for that special moment. Finally Gehrig made his exit and I remember looking

at him and thinking, "He's real! He moves!" and I followed him onto the field.

The manager assigned me to shag balls in the outfield and I about got bombarded with fly balls trying to watch Gehrig on the practice field and retrieve the baseballs. After he had taken his turn at the batting cage, he circled the field several times to get his legs in shape and then headed for the dugout. I thought, "Here's my chance to be alone with him." So I grabbed a fairly good-looking baseball off the field and ran as hard as I could to follow him.

When I got to the dugout, he had disappeared. I had a little courage and started down the stairs and up the corridor into the clubhouse. Then this gigantic trainer came out of nowhere. "Hey, kid, where are you going?"

He scared me. I just held up the baseball and said, "Ball."

He said, "You can't go in there. That's for players only."

"I'm the bat boy for the other team."

"I don't care who you are," and he mentioned some adjectives we do not use in church. I learned then that there are some people who do not understand youth.

I turned very dejectedly to walk out of the dugout, got to the top step, and a deep voice from in the dugout said, "Hey, trainer, that boy's with me." And I turned around and in the shadow was Lou Gehrig.

I remember looking at the trainer and saying with my chin out, "Yeah, we're together."

I walked down the stairs and Gehrig came over and put that big old lovable arm around me and said, "What can I do for you, son?"

I said, "Ball."

He took the baseball and looked at it and said, "You don't have any autographs."

"I want yours."

"Wouldn't you like the other Yankees to sign it?"

"Well, yes."

He said, "Look, why don't you go finish your practice and as soon as you get through

out there and the players come in, I'll take you into the clubhouse and we'll get all the Yankees to sign it. All right?"

"All right."

The moment after the practice was over, I met my friend and he took me into the clubhouse. Seated at the first cubicle as we walked in the door was a hometown boy who had gone on to be a Hall of Famer and, I think, the greatest catcher the game ever produced Bill Dickey. Lou Gehrig said, "Hey, Bill, this kid thinks you're kind of important. Would you sign his ball?" And Bill Dickey signed it. We made a tour around the whole clubhouse. Over in the corner, up from San Francisco that year, was the rookie of the Yankees, Joe DiMaggio. Gehrig said, "Hey, Joe, this kid thinks you're going places. Would you sign his ball?" And he signed it. Then Gehrig took it and he put, "To my friend, Paul Dunn." Well, that was the celestial kingdom. Then he put his arm around me and said, "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

I said, "I want to grow up and be like you and play ball."

And he patted me on the head and said, "Oh, I think you'll do better."

And I said, "But every time I go out to play I get so nervous and afraid I can't perform." You see, I was starting to feel inferior.

He asked, "You going to be out here tomorrow?"

I said, "I live here."

"Let me think about this and you and I get together tomorrow. Would you?"

"Yes, sir."

"That was the longest night I ever spent in my life. Would you understand, young people, that I took my baseball and glove to bed? My mother came in about eleven o'clock and said, "What are you doing with that dirty thing in bed?"

The next morning the Yankees were due at nine and I was there at six. We went through the same ritual. This time I was asked to shag

balls behind the batting-practice pitcher so he would not have to bend over so far throwing baseballs in for practice hitting. Red Ruffin, another Hall of Famer, was on the mound and he had a vocabulary that was interesting for a twelve-year-old to hear. About the fifth batter into the batting cage was Gehrig and my heart beat a little faster as he stepped in. As he walked up, after knocking the dirt out of his cleats, he stood there and adjusted his cap. Then he looked out to his friend Ruffin and said, "Hey, Red, let that kid behind you pitch to me."

And I went, "Enhhh!"

Red did not want to. He said, "Oh, I want to get through, Lou, and take a shower."

And Gehrig just stood there. "I said let the boy pitch."

Ruffin turned around and said, "Here, kid."

You ladies may not know it, but a baseball only weighs about five and a half ounces—but it felt like a sixteen-pound shot put. I walked up onto the mound. I was sixty feet, six inches from my idol. He could see I was concerned. I was feeling very inferior. He took that magnificent bat and just held it there and then pushed it out. He said, "Just aim at the bat, son." And I threw the ball somewhere in the park. Then I got one reasonably close and he hit a little ground ball back to me. And then he hit another one. And then he hit a short pop fly over second. Then, about the fourth or fifth pitch, he let go. The right field wall of the Little Rock playing field was 395 feet away, but the ball just tailed out. Then he hit another one right behind it. And a third. I felt a little better because I was getting the ball close. I wound up—you know, how hard can a twelve-year-old throw?—and I just grooved that pitch. He took that mighty Gehrig swing and he missed. He stood up said, "Beautiful!"

I remember growing on the mound and thinking, "Look out, world; I'm coming." It took me several years before I realized he did

that on purpose. Some people know how to teach youth.

He called me off the mound, put his arm around me and said, "You remember the question you asked me yesterday?"

"Yes, sir."

He said, "I've watched you very closely this morning. You're going to be great and I'm counting on you. Let me just teach you one little lesson. Just remember, young man, every time you walk out on the ball field and you feel nervous and concerned and like you can't do it, know that so do we, and that's the Lord's way." Imagine this nonmember athlete talking to a boy this way! I think about this quite often as I turn on my television set and see some so-called athletes with a can of light beer in their hands. And we call that a hero?

Here was that wonderful man saying, "Whenever I walk out on a ball field I feel nervous and concerned but I am reminded there's a higher source than you and me and I'd better call on it. And remember this: in the game of life, my boy, there are eight other players on the ball field and you can't go alone. It's a team effort." I have never forgotten. Then he said as we walked away, "You'll find as you grow a little older that there will be people who will tell you you can't, and they'll even be in your profession. Whenever that occurs, you tell them I said you could."

On my eighteenth birthday, I signed a professional baseball contract and was sent to the Pioneer League. I won my first ball game seven to one, and that was a proud moment. I walked off the field and the coach on the opposing team said in a sneery voice, "Hey, kid, whoever said you could pitch?"

I looked right at him and said, "Gehrig."

And he said, "Oh."

Thank God for great leaders and teachers.

Now it takes a lot of courage. Courage is a hard thing for you and me to define. It comes in somewhat different forms. Sometimes it is a man or a woman facing a very difficult

situation. It is doing, I think, the thing you and I have to do at the time we have to do it, and generally there is no glamour attached to it. Have you ever noticed?

Sometimes we think of great athletes or heroes on the battlefield, and that is certainly a form of courage. But we do not usually find ourselves in those particular positions. I am grateful that there are courageous men and women in all walks of life. I think it takes as much courage to be the right kind of woman in the home as it does to be a soldier on the battlefield. It is a hard thing to describe. It is not a quality; it is not a thing. It takes, I think, real effort to be courageous.

I have been on a battlefield, on an athletic field, in the business world, and in the education world; and one of the greatest displays of courage comes with you and me standing up for what is right. It is fairly easy to be a Mormon here in the Marriott Center. You notice the temptation is not too great right now, is it? It comes when you and I get out there in the world. And yet, in every profession in which I have found myself, I have been proud to be a Latter-day Saint. It has been an asset and never a liability. Permit two examples.

During my first year in professional baseball I was married in the temple, and that presents a little problem in dressing rooms with uncouth athletes. But I found that holding to righteousness and not parading it before men brought great love, respect, and honor. For the sake of the person involved, because he still lives, I will simply describe this first great catcher in my professional baseball career as an old pro from the Washington Senators and about as uncouth as they come. He was built like a small King Kong. When he would dress up and get behind that plate, he was something else; but his other activities included women, gambling, and pornographic material. And he thought that was being manly.

Two months after I joined the club we were on a road trip. It was two in the morning and I was asleep in my hotel room. A knock came at the door. I got up to answer it and there was this big old burly catcher standing there in his pajamas.

"Can I come in?"

"Come on in." I closed the door.

"Don't tell anybody I'm here."

"I'm not going to tell anybody. What can I do for you?"

"Paul," he said, "I've watched you for two months and I kind of like what I see. I would like to learn how to be more like that. Would you help me? I'd like to learn to find God. Can you help?"

"Sure."

So I got this big old filthy catcher on his knees and we prayed together. And he got up doing this [wipes eyes on sleeve]. "Thank you. Don't tell the others."

In the next two months, six other players came in to talk. They did not particularly want to parade it, but they did honor it.

We won the championship after a very interesting playoff game. I drew the assignment to pitch. In the top of the eighth inning the score was nothing to nothing. The first batter against me singled sharply to right field and took second on a fielder's choice. Have you got the picture? One out, winning run on second. The batter I was now facing hit .326 for the season. I worked him to a two-two count. He fouled several pitches and then I got the ball too close to the center—a horrible mistake.

He singled sharply to left center and the ball went out there like a bullet, hit the ground on one bounce, and went to the center fielder. Normally that would score a runner from second very easily, but the ball carried such velocity I am sure the runner did not understand it. We had a great center fielder; he took the ball on one hop, threw a perfect strike to the plate, and caught the runner by a good six inches. The umpire hollered, "You're out!" This man

got up—and I had never heard such foul language in my life. I was back behind the catcher by this time, the normal position for the pitcher on a throw to the plate.

The umpire bellowed, "You're out of the game! Out!" And he ejected him, which he should have. As I was walking back to the mound, the umpire—*not* a Mormon—about ready to replace his mask, turned to me and said, "Paul, forgive him; he doesn't understand." How grateful I am to be a Latter-day Saint.

Let me conclude with a little parable. Have you ever heard the parable of the eagle? It's a classic. It seems a certain man went through the forest seeking any bird of interest he might find. He caught a young eagle, brought it home and put it among his fowls and ducks and turkeys and gave it chicken's food to eat even though it was an eagle, the king of the birds.

Five years later a naturalist came to see him and after passing through his garden said, "That bird is an eagle, not a chicken."

"Yes," said the owner, "But I have trained it to be a chicken. It is no longer an eagle. It is a chicken, even though it measures fifteen feet from tip to tip of its wings."

"No," said the naturalist. "It is an eagle still; it has the heart of an eagle and I will make it soar high up to the heavens."

"No," said the owner, "it is a chicken, and it will never fly."

They agreed to test it. The naturalist picked up the eagle. "Thou dost belong to the sky and not to this earth; stretch forth thy wings and fly." The eagle turned this way and that and, then, looking down, saw the chickens eating their food and down he jumped.

The owner said, "I told you it was a chicken."

"No," said the naturalist, "it is an eagle. Give it another chance tomorrow."

So the next day he took it to the top of the house and said, "Eagle, thou art an eagle; stretch forth thy wings and fly." But again the

eagle, seeing the chickens feeding, jumped down and fed with them.

Then the owner said, "I told you it was a chicken."

"No," asserted the naturalist, "it is an eagle and it still has the heart of an eagle. Only give it one more chance, and I will make it fly tomorrow."

The next morning he rose early and took the eagle outside the city, away from the houses, to the foot of a high mountain. The sun was just rising, gilding the top of the mountain with gold, and every crag was glistening in the joy of that beautiful morning.

He picked up the eagle and said to it, "Eagle, thou art an eagle. Thou dost belong to the sky and not to this earth. Stretch forth thy wings and fly." The eagle looked around and trembled as if new life were coming to it. But it did not fly. The naturalist then made it look straight at the sun. Suddenly it stretched out its wings and, with the screech of an eagle, it flew.

For all of you, my beloved young brothers and sisters, who are keeping your eyes cast down with the chickens, for those of you who are grubbing and pecking like a chicken because you doubt your ability to succeed in

your fondest dreams, will you remember these words today, "O eagle, thou art an eagle. Stretch forth thy wings and fly."

What we need is to be filled with a divine discontent—a reaching, a stretching, an aching to be what we can be, to belong to the sky. We need to recognize that the deepest urge of our being is to use our powers to develop our gifts. All of us have an innate need to shine in use; a desire to increase the bounds of ourselves, to learn more, to do more, to express more; a desire to grow, improve, accomplish, expand. It is an energy that originates from our deepest being. When you feel like quitting—and who doesn't, on occasion?—dust off your dreams and remember the Scottish prayer: "O God, help me to have a high opinion of myself."

You, my beloved young brothers and sisters, were born to succeed, to soar, to be like unto God. May you know that I know that, for I have an abiding faith in God and in his Son Jesus Christ. This is his church and the Lord, through revelation, is asking us to come back home to be like him. God bless you to do it and to soar high in the process, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.