

Faith, Hope, and You

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I am grateful to be with you today. I know that I am in the presence of a most outstanding group of young people—you who are earnestly striving to achieve in both your spiritual and temporal lives. As I look into your faces, I see goodness, optimism, determination, and hope for the future. I am particularly grateful to be with you at such an important time when you are preparing for your life that will shortly go beyond the safety and sanctuary of school—a life that some of you may see as bleak and concerning and that others will see as full of excitement and opportunity. As I pondered and prayed about what I might say to you today, I could not dismiss the promptings to talk to you about what lies ahead as you move into the world that you will soon become a part of. I pray for the Lord’s inspiration as I visit with you. I begin by relating a personal experience.

Some 30 years ago I was working for a corporation headquartered in the United States that had international operations. We had recently hired a Jewish man to run our European businesses. It was known by many in the corporation that as a young boy he had been torn from the safety and the love of his family and thrust into a Nazi concentration camp for the duration of World War II. Since

he and I shared some responsibilities for our European operations, we occasionally traveled to Europe together. On one such trip, after we had become well acquainted and I felt it not inappropriate, I inquired about his terrible experiences during those several years of his life.

As I remember the details, he told me that when he was five years old, his father, mother, and older sister had already been taken by the Gestapo. He and his grandmother were traveling by train to find refuge when the Gestapo boarded and searched the train. He and his grandmother were discovered and taken separate ways, and he never again saw his grandmother. In fact, he never again saw any of his family members.

It is not my intent to describe the already known atrocities that occurred to those so confined but to relate a lesson my co-worker taught me while enduring those terrible years. As he concluded recounting his experiences, and after several minutes of contemplative silence, he then asked me this question: “Do

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you know what the most powerful force in the world is?”

Without hesitation I answered, “Love. Love conquers all. If only your persecutors had love for you and for their fellow man, you would not have suffered as you did.”

He responded, “No, it is not love. All those years I was in the concentration camp, I had love. I had love for my mother, father, and sister. I had love for my grandmother. But that love did not sustain me. It did not keep me alive.” And then he said, “Hope. Hope is the most powerful force. It was hope that kept me alive. It was hope that I would survive. It was hope for freedom. It was hope that I would someday be reunited with my loved ones.”

His declaration of hope turned my mind to another experience I had as a young missionary in the New York area. After a long and tiring day of being rejected at one home after another, we finally came to a house where we were invited in. It was apparent that the lady of the house was grieving. She began the conversation by explaining that she was Jewish and that she had just lost her husband. She wanted to hear our belief about life after death. She wanted to know every detail. Would her husband be resurrected? What would he be like? Would she be resurrected? Would they see each other again? Would there be suffering? Would there be happiness?

The situation offered us an opportunity to teach and bear witness of Jesus Christ and the hope that comes from His sacrifice that was given to all mankind. We were able to explain from the Book of Mormon that Christ broke the bands of death, that all shall be raised from the dead, and that spirit and body would be reunited in its perfect frame. While we were never invited back to this lady’s home, I believe we gave her some hope. It was also a great reminder to two young missionaries of the love Christ has for us and the power of His infinite, eternal sacrifice that gives us eternal hope.

The suffering and the misery shown through this sister’s questioning brought to mind the profound declaration of the Apostle Paul when he declared:

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

[1 Corinthians 15:19–20]

The scriptures often group faith, hope, and charity together. For the next few minutes I would like to talk not about faith, hope, and charity but about faith, hope, and you. I would like to talk about how the powerful twin forces of faith and hope can affect your future. The Apostle Paul, Alma, and many other prophets saw hope as the result of exercising faith. Alma explained: “Therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (Alma 32:21). And Moroni, in one of his final addresses, explained:

I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope?

And what is it ye shall hope for? . . . That ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ.

[Moroni 7:40–41]

And Paul further declared, “We are saved by hope” (Romans 8:24). Like the lifesaving motivation to a young Jewish boy in a concentration camp, hope becomes the catalyst for works that bring us to the lifesaving ordinances.

Hope is the reward we all seek: hope for a young boy held in a prison camp, hope for a Jewish lady who had just lost her beloved husband, hope that each of you have for now and for the future, hope for the families you have or will have.

However, our hope can become blurred as we live in troubled times. We live in a world today of isms—agnosticism, secularism, atheism, pessimism, and other isms. And today

we certainly live in a time of great pessimism and concern. We face challenges both economically and spiritually. The stock market, a rather reliable index of public sentiment, has had distressing declines in value. The unemployment rate has risen from the comfortable levels we enjoyed in the past. Homes are foreclosing at an alarming rate, unusually high energy costs are affecting all of us, and so forth. But we have been through economic downturns before. Perhaps most alarming is a retreat toward a godless society as more people are moving away from faith in Deity and the establishment of basic moral values that have become the basis of a righteous life and are challenging our religious beliefs and our lifestyle.

The evidence of the decline in moral values is readily available as we see the continued rise of pornography, the rampant use of illegal drugs, cohabitating outside of marriage, and every other degenerate practice known to man.

There are two well-known and often-quoted prophecies in the Book of Mormon pertaining to our day—yes, pertaining to you and pertaining to me. First is this scripture:

For behold, at that day [our day] shall he [being Satan] rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security. [2 Nephi 28:20–21]

And the second scripture states:

Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! [2 Nephi 15:20]

These two scriptures indicate that Satan will “stir them up to anger against that which is good” and will “call evil good, and good evil.” And this is what we face today. The righteous are accused of being intolerant and without compassion. Those attempting to live the

time-honored teachings of Christ are often considered out of touch and uninformed. Those staying true to our most sacred principles are ridiculed and sometimes even persecuted. And much sin has now been accepted as mainstream, enlightened, and good. And you can name the sins.

From the beginning Satan has attempted to destroy our hope in Christ by thwarting the plan of salvation—or the great plan of happiness as referred to by Alma (see Alma 42:8). And Satan’s work continues even today. He doesn’t take the whole congregation all at once, but he works on each individually—one by one. He will be there during personal or family tragedy. He will be there when we are discouraged or despondent. And he will be there during the hours of confusion and questioning. He is the ultimate pessimist. He is the instigator of much discouragement. He is the father of all lies. He will use the Internet and the media, and he will use the already confused or misguided. He has his soldiers, both seen and unseen.

I review this rather dismal background not to further add to discouragement and disillusionment but as a warning as we face the forces in today’s world. And yet we have every reason for optimism. We are the people of hope. We are the disseminators of hope. This is our mission. Based upon our faith, we have hope in things seen and hope in things unseen but felt. We have hope for the now in our lives. We have hope for the foreseeable and unforeseeable future. And we have hope for the eternities that lie ahead. Our hope is based upon truth, knowledge, faith, and revelation given to us by the Holy Ghost. And our victory over the obstacles of life comes from our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and our sure knowledge of His plan. This gives us hope, as eloquently explained by the prophets of old, as well as by our current prophets.

The prophet Nephi declared, “Men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). The Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “Happiness is

the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it" (*HC* 5:134). When the Prophet Joseph made that statement, he was only reiterating and emphasizing the fundamental purpose of our coming to the earth as declared by our Heavenly Father. However, while we hope for happiness—the personal and real measure of success—the achievement of that objective must be earned. As the Prophet Joseph Smith declared, our happiness "will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it." Alma explained that faith must be nurtured, even to a perfect knowledge (see *Alma* 32:34). Our responsibility is first to tend our own faith and then to spread our faith and our hope to others. We cannot allow ourselves to become distracted by the fluctuation of the economic barometers. We cannot allow ourselves to become distracted by attacks on the doctrine or leaders of the Church. We cannot allow ourselves to abandon faith-based principles because our faith cannot be measured in a test tube or counted in centimeters or grams. We need to hold to the iron rod and rely on the sure knowledge that comes from personal revelation. Then we keep the hope alive not only for ourselves but also for our posterity. And then our hope becomes a certainty.

In a CES fireside just a few years ago, President Boyd K. Packer instructed, "You young people, move ahead in your lives. It is a marvelous time to be alive" ("The Instrument of Your Mind and the Foundation of Your Character," 2 February 2003). President Thomas S. Monson recently confirmed that "opportunities are limitless, many things are right, and we have much to be grateful for" (General Authority training, 30 September 2008; see also "An Attitude of Gratitude," *Ensign*, May 1992, 54).

Yes, what a wonderful time to be living. What great opportunities lie ahead. I envy you. You have every reason for great hope as you enter the years ahead.

I have met people who have lost all hope because of serious sin or transgression. Repentance, they feel, is beyond their reach and forgiveness outside of their grasp. Such do not understand the cleansing power of the Atonement. Or, if they do understand, they have not internalized the meaning of Christ's suffering in Gethsemane—a suffering so great that Christ bled from every pore; a suffering so great that the Savior, even the Son of God, asked if it were possible that He be released from His divine assignment; a suffering so great that an angel of the Lord came down and stood beside the Savior. For any of us to give up hope for the cleansing and purifying of our lives is to disavow the depth, power, and extent of His suffering in our behalf.

A few years ago I had a stake conference on the East Coast. While at the conference I had the assignment to interview a young 21-year-old man to determine his worthiness and preparation to serve a mission. Now, you are aware that General Authorities do not usually interview potential missionaries for worthiness. So this was an unusual and special situation. During my flight to the East, I read some background information regarding the reasons for my interview. As I read this information, my heart ached for this boy and for his family. He had committed almost every transgression there was. I believe he invented some transgressions. I wondered why I would be asked to visit one with such a background. I had already concluded that it would be most unusual for me to approve him as a missionary.

After the Saturday evening session of conference, I retired to the stake president's office for the interview. As I was waiting with the door open, a handsome young man with a wonderful countenance and a glow about him approached. I wondered how I could excuse myself because it was apparent he wanted to talk to me and I had an appointment with a very troubled young man. When he reached me, he stuck out his hand and introduced

himself. This was the young man I was to interview.

In the privacy of the office, I asked just one question: "Why am I interviewing you tonight?"

He then began to recount his sordid past—every transgression. When he was through, he began to explain the steps and the personal suffering he had gone through to prepare for this very interview. He then talked about the Atonement—the infinite power of the Atonement. He bore his testimony of the Atonement and expressed his love for the Savior. And then he said, "I believe the Savior's personal suffering in Gethsemane and His sacrifice upon the cross was powerful enough to rescue even a man like me."

Moved by the humility and testimony of this young man, and moved by the Spirit, I placed my hand on his shoulder and said, "When I get back to Salt Lake City, I am going to recommend you serve a mission as a representative of Jesus Christ." And then I said, "I am only going to ask one thing of you. When you get into the mission field, I want you to be the best missionary in the entire Church. That is all."

Three or four months later, Sister Edgley and I were speaking at the Missionary Training Center. At the conclusion of the devotional, I was standing in front of the podium visiting with missionaries when I saw a young man with a familiar face walking toward me.

When he reached me, he stuck out his hand and asked, "Do you remember me?"

Somewhat embarrassed, I said, "I'm sorry, I know I should know you, but I just don't remember."

And then he said, "Let me tell you who I am. I am the best missionary in the Missionary Training Center." And I believed him.

This young man's hope was based not only upon a knowledge and testimony of the Atonement but also upon a personalization of this gift. He understood that it was for him personally! Yes, he knew the power of the

Atonement and the hope it gives when all might seem lost or hopeless.

I have met people who have felt the trials they face are insurmountable and the weight is unbearable. They can't find the strength or hope to carry on, and thus they have just given up. They have literally become nonfunctional. Perhaps such people do not understand the meaning of the word *infinite* as it applies to the Atonement. They have not internalized the Atonement. They have not internalized that it was not only for sin but also for personal suffering, for pain, for disappointment, for failures, and for the tragedy that we will all experience at some time. They may understand the doctrine. They may even believe the doctrine, but they can't see it as it applies to them. They may feel unworthy or they may feel they are too distant from the Savior, and they suffer great pain.

I have met people who have no sense of self-worth. They feel that they don't measure up, that they are totally incapable, and that they are either a failure or destined to be a failure. To them, hope is only an illusive ideal far beyond their reach. Perhaps such people do not understand what it means to be a child of God, created in the image and likeness of the Only Begotten and endowed with the power and comfort of the Holy Ghost. Such people, perhaps, do not understand the divine nature of their very being, and they suffer great pain.

I have met young men and young women who were afraid to start their marriages because of unsuccessful marriages they have witnessed or because of an uncertain or a perceived frightening future. Such people do not understand the meaning of walking by faith in eternal companionships, and they suffer great pain.

I have personally observed many who have emerged from their sorrows and a state of hopelessness as they find and apply the reassuring principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They have gained an understanding of the

Atonement and their relationship with God and received the gift of the Holy Ghost with its accompanying power. And then I have seen these same people rise up out of the chains of addiction. I've seen them emerge from the shadows of low self-esteem. I have seen them conquer doubt and uncertainty. And I have seen them press forward in the hope of Christ and live happy, productive lives.

Sometimes things can look bleak, discouraging, and dark, and in the midst of our prayers and searching we end up without a comforting answer of hope or optimism. Yet we must move forward with faith and hope.

Sometimes our faith and hope become challenged as we stand at crossroads with life-defining decisions that must be made. And yet after intense study, prayer, and fasting, we still don't get the burning in our bosom that gives the comfort and assurances that we hoped for. Still, we must move forward with optimism and hope, even into the unknown and the currently unseen. I have personally anguished over decisions with fasting and prayer without receiving the prayed-for assurances. Of necessity I had to move forward into the unknown. But I have learned from such experiences that when one does all he can to seek assurances and then moves into the darkness with faith and hope, the confirmation as to the correctness of the decision eventually comes—sometimes days later and sometimes years later, but it comes.

As Nephi recounted his journey to retrieve the plates of Laban, he stated: "And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do" (1 Nephi 4:6). And we read Moroni saying in the book of Ether: "Wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith" (Ether 12:6). This is what we call pressing forward with faith. This is one of the ways the Lord tests us. This is one of the ways we prove ourselves.

And so I conclude where I started. Hope is a most powerful influence in our lives. Yes indeed, we do live in a troubled and challenging world. But we live in one of the greatest periods of time in all the history of the entire world. It is a time that I believe every prophet since the creation of the earth prophesied of and looked forward to. We have every reason to be optimistic and full of hope—hope for this life, hope for our children, and hope for the eternities to come. And so I say never, never, never let Satan's power of belittlement, discouragement, or disillusionment direct your lives. Never, never, never lose hope. And never, never, never give up believing in yourself.

Christ said:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.
[John 15:5]

And it was the Apostle Paul who said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

I would add to Paul's declaration of hope: Since God is for us; since Christ atoned; if we really understand our divinity as a child of God; and if we truly carry the Holy Ghost as a companion—how can we not be full of hope?

Our opportunity is not only to move forward with gratitude, faith, and hope; ours is also the opportunity to be carriers of optimism and of faith and to spread the hope of the gospel to others throughout the world. After all, that is what Jesus died for. We can and we do move forward with great faith and assurances. And I bear my humble witness to you that Christ is real. His Atonement is real. And we have hope in Christ in this life and in the life to come. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.