

The Other Side of Heaven

JOHN H. GROBERG

Elder Groberg: My dear brothers and sisters, we are happy to be here. Jean and I met at BYU in 1952 on a blind date arranged by our sisters, who played violins together in the BYU Symphony. It was the first date for either of us at BYU. Since Jean was from California and I was from Idaho, how grateful do you think we are for BYU? Five years later we were married in the Los Angeles Temple. Those were five exciting, frustrating, trial-ridden years—but we knew what was right, and, despite serious challenges, things worked out, as they always do with the Lord’s help. We loved one another then, and now—49 years, 11 children, and 33 grandchildren later—we love each other more than ever. Joy comes from true love. This joy is available to everyone if they will just follow these three simple steps:

1. Learn the truth.
2. Promise to live the truth.
3. Live the truth and trust the Lord that

when you have done all you can, He will come to your rescue.

Love is largely an eternal commitment to think of and help someone else—especially a wife or husband or child—more than yourself. If we keep helping others regardless of their reciprocation, our soul keeps expanding, and

eventually we can become like unto God, helping others with no limits.

To me the opposite of love is not hate but selfishness, or indifference. Selfishness shrivels the soul. Constantly thinking of and protecting ourselves causes us to become smaller. If we persist in this, we eventually shrink down to practically nothing.

A good sign of how truly we love someone is how anxiously we help them—even at the expense of our own convenience.

The truest love of all is the Savior’s love and God’s love for us. Think of the Savior’s commitment to suffer for us and even to lay down His life for us, despite the almost total lack of appreciation of those around Him at the time.

What others do to us is almost incidental. The eternal principle of growth through true love—by helping others—lies within each

*John H. Groberg was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional was given at Brigham Young University on 4 December 2001. The event included clips of the film *The Other Side of Heaven*, based on Elder Groberg’s book “*In the Eye of the Storm*.”*

one of us. And when this true love lies within both husband and wife, we can literally experience heaven on earth. I hope you all experience that! I love the Lord, I love my wife, I love my family, I love BYU, and I love all of you.

Again, the pattern for growth and joy in this life is:

1. Learn the truth—know what is right.

2. Promise, or commit, to live the truth.

3. Keep that promise, no matter what trials may come, by trusting the Lord to help you.

I promise He will!

The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Having faith in Him means to trust Him. We must trust that what He tells us—through the scriptures, through prayer, through inspired teachers, through good leaders and parents—is right. Trust that He will help us keep our promises by making up the difference when we have done all we can. I personally know He will.

Here are some examples that apply to you particularly:

Code of Honor

When you come to BYU you are given a code of honor.

1. Study it, pray about it—learn that it is right.

2. Make a promise to keep it.

3. Keep it. The Lord will help you do so, and you will grow.

Missions

1. Gain a testimony that you should serve a mission. I am talking particularly, but not exclusively, to the young men.

2. Promise yourself and the Lord that you will serve.

3. Then serve. Serve the Lord with all your heart, might, mind, and strength. I promise you the Lord will help you. Both you young men and women must help one another stay worthy and focused on this goal.

Temple Marriage

1. Gain a testimony that marrying in the temple is what the Lord wants you to do.

2. Make a promise that you will do everything in your power to make this happen.

Always live worthy and trust the Lord fully that that desire will be fulfilled in His own time.

3. Then get married to the right person at the right time and in the right place. Once you know it is right, don't delay unreasonably. The Lord will help you. To those already married, continue to keep those eternal promises with the Lord as a partner.

School

1. Decide on an area you can do well in.

2. Promise to do your best.

3. Do your best, and again the Lord will help you.

This is the law of eternal progression. There are many other examples.

Recently the movie *The Other Side of Heaven* was produced. The person who had the vision is a former BYU graduate, Mitch Davis. Three years ago he approached Bookcraft to purchase the movie rights of the book *In the Eye of the Storm*, which I had written several years before (at the request of a Church leader whom I greatly respect). Bookcraft said they were willing to sell those rights but felt Mitch should first talk to me. Of course I was very surprised.

Jean and I were very uncomfortable with the possibility of having our lives on “the silver screen.” It may be some people's dream, but it definitely was not ours.

Let me state clearly that I do not feel my mission was any more special or purposeful than any other person's mission. Everyone's mission and marriage is special to them because it is theirs. And if they put their whole heart and soul into it, God will make it eternally meaningful.

When Jean and I met Mitch we were impressed with his integrity and his credentials

and those of the Hollywood team he had assembled. I talked to my Church leaders, and they said if Mitch and his team promised to remain true to the spirit of the book, they would raise no objection.

Mitch made that promise and purchased the movie rights. He and his team then began the difficult task of raising money (there is no Church money involved; it is a private venture), adapting the book to the screen, selecting actors, shooting on location, editing, getting the music, and on and on. Despite many challenges, they persevered and did it.

Think again of the three steps.

1. They had a confirmation that it was right to make a movie from this book.
2. They made a promise to keep the movie true to the spirit of the book.
3. They did it. There were many trials, but with the Lord's help they did it.

At this time we will view the theater preview, after which Mitch Davis will take a few minutes.

[A film clip was shown here.]

Mitch Davis: It is so good to be here with my lovely bride, who I also met and courted on this hallowed campus.

Several years ago I had a very dramatic experience regarding trusting the Lord. I was backpacking with my 10-year-old son, two of his friends, and our faithful dog, Pluto, when we were hit by lightning.

We were hiking above timberline when a sudden storm blew in. We pitched our tent, and I put the boys inside their sleeping bags to keep them warm. I started fixing dinner on our little camp stove. Then, suddenly, I was gone.

Although I have no recollection of the lightning hitting me, the boys tell me that it blasted through our tent's roof and hit me square in the chest and that I flew backward and landed on

the floor unconscious with my eyes open but rolled back into my head.

The bulk of the strike passed through my chest and into the dog sitting behind me, killing him. The rest of the lightning curled down my right arm and struck the boy seated next to me, then danced wickedly about the tent, burning holes in sleeping bags and striking the two other boys.

But I knew nothing about this. In my mind, at least, I ceased to exist.

After some time I became aware of myself again. I began to be able to hear, although I could not see or move any part of my body. As if from a great distance I could hear the three boys screaming. I heard my son cry out, "Dad, please don't die!" One of the boys leaned over and gave me a single puff of artificial respiration. The other promised God he would never do another bad thing in his entire life if Brother Davis would just wake up.

But I couldn't wake up. I could only lie there, helpless, wondering what in the world had happened to me.

Then I became aware of something else—a dark presence I can only describe as impending death. I felt myself starting to leave mortality and realized my only hope was divine intervention. I fought with every fiber of my being to call on Heavenly Father.

Then a most interesting thing happened. Before I could call on Father, He called on me. Through the unmistakably clear voice of the Spirit, He encouraged me with these simple words: "You served a valiant mission. Ask in confidence."

Heavenly Father knew I needed extra faith at that moment. He knew I had faith in Him but lacked faith in myself as a worthy recipient of the miracle I so desperately needed. So he sent me that encouraging message: "You served a valiant mission. Ask in confidence."

I exerted every ounce of faith I had in a fervent, frenzied prayer. Heavenly Father responded by immediately freeing me from

death's grip. I regained consciousness and the strength, several hours later, to hike off the mountain with my boy, his friends, and the body of our dog.

I do not tell you this story for the sake of mere drama, nor to boast about my personal missionary prowess. I assure you I was no more valiant than most missionaries. I tell you this story because of the significance of the Lord's choice of words to me: When my life literally hung in the balance, all that mattered were my two years of obscure service in the villages of Argentina.

How grateful I was I had decided to go on a mission and that I had worked hard once I got there! I remembered the words of my great BYU stake president, Robert K. Thomas: "If you're almost worthy, almost willing to make the sacrifice, you'll almost get the blessing." I wondered what the Lord would have said to me on that mountain had I *almost* decided to serve a mission.

I am so grateful the Lord Jesus Christ didn't "almost" atone for our sins. I am grateful Elder John Groberg didn't "almost" serve a valiant mission, and I know that he is grateful that Jean didn't "almost" wait for him.

Today, especially, I am grateful for you: the blessed, beloved students of this, "the Lord's university." You each have your own missions—past, present, and future. May you fulfill them valiantly, faithfully, fearlessly.

And during the dark times, may you hear the voice of the Lord whispering encouragement to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Groberg: We will now see a brief clip from the movie. It is from a situation that took place after I had been out on my mission a little over a year.

After the clip we will be honored to hear from my wife, Jean. She will explain some of her feelings and tell how she came to send me a picture of herself that helped me avoid some

potentially dangerous pitfalls. Notice again the three steps: Knowing, promising, and doing.

[A film clip was shown here.]

Sister Groberg: What wonderful memories I have of BYU. I loved everything about it: my classes, my roommates and dorm life, my involvement in the Church and school activities. John mentioned our first date. It was to the campus branch Priesthood Ball. We enjoyed devotionals in the Smith Fieldhouse, concerts, forums, talking, and walking down Campus Hill to an old swing. There are great times to be had without spending money! We both dated other people, but the more we got acquainted with others, the more we were drawn to each other.

When John left on his mission, we agreed to write. So for three years I wrote "Dear John" letters while continuing a busy life that included studying, dating, graduating, then going on to teach school.

To help tell the story in the film, Mitch adeptly used letters exchanged between Box 58, Nuku'alofa, Tonga, and Apartment 109, Richards Hall, Provo, Utah. The letters shown in the film are authentic—I loaned some to Mitch. We saved them all these years because they played such a significant role in our lives.

Often a letter John had written months earlier would arrive at just the right time, sharing an experience or some counsel that helped solve a concern I had right then. I began measuring myself and others to the mark of what I could tell John was becoming, and I knew I wanted to be available when he returned. The Lord blessed us both to be patient and always added extra help.

During fall quarter of my senior year, I tried to think of something appropriate to send John for Christmas. I didn't want to distract him from his missionary work, but I wanted to send something. My helpful roommates encouraged me to send a photo

of myself. “Too presumptuous,” I thought, as he had never asked for a picture nor given me one of himself. My roommates persisted, and since I couldn’t think of anything else I could afford to mail, I sent him one. Never did I suspect it, but at the same time he sent a picture of himself to me! These two photos crossed in the mail, and both did great amounts of good on the other end.

Was it coincidence that my picture arrived in Tonga just in time to provide John a tangible form with which to reason with an otherwise unreasonable mother? I don’t believe so. And all the letters I received at just the right time saying just the right thing, were they coincidence? I don’t believe so.

When we strive to learn the Lord’s will, promise to follow it, then do our very best, the Lord will work with us where we are to help us get where we should be. He uses daily events and people in our lives to give us opportunities to keep our promises to Him. As we do all we can, He directs events and magnifies our humble efforts until His purposes and promises are realized—both in our lives and in the lives of those we touch. That is how we experience true joy.

I testify that our loving Father in Heaven knows and loves us individually. He sent us here at the right time and place to learn and grow and serve to our fullest potential. I know that Jesus Christ’s all-encompassing love for His Father and for each of us, as expressed in His infinite Atonement, has made it possible for us to return to Their presence. I pray that we might do so. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Groberg: This next clip is about the faith of a Tongan branch president. The only way to get from island to island was by sailboat, so we sailed a lot. Two things sailors fear at sea are (1) being becalmed, and (2) being caught in severe storms. Being becalmed is when the wind ceases to blow

and you just sit in the middle of the ocean going nowhere. We were on our way to teach a family on a small island when we were becalmed. See if you can sense how the branch president followed the three steps of eternal progress, including repentance.

[A film clip was shown here.]

We will now view the final clip, which is about the other fear sailors have: severe storms at sea. We had finished a successful circuit of preaching on several islands and were sailing home when we were hit by a fierce, albeit brief, tropical squall. Notice the symbolism in Jean’s reaching out to save me. Many a man caught in the violent storms of life is saved by a faithful woman.

[A film clip was shown here.]

I remember thinking, when I was flipped out of the boat: This shouldn’t be happening. I’m a missionary. Where’s my protection? Missionaries aren’t supposed to swim! It didn’t take me long to realize that I had better quit complaining and start swimming. Eventually I made it to shore. In life, when “unfair” things happen to us, we shouldn’t use energy complaining but use it “swimming.” When things go against us, if we row or swim with all our might, the Lord will bless us, and we’ll make it to shore.

Having experienced lives and elements in chaos, I appreciate more than ever the power and goodness of God in bringing order out of chaos in organizing the earth; dividing light from dark, land from ocean; and bringing plant, animal, and finally human life to this earth. Let us follow Him: Learn the truth, make promises to live the truth, and do all in our power to keep those promises. Sometimes we will feel becalmed, with our lives drifting aimlessly. Other times we will feel we are in the midst of major storms. But

if we try our hardest, I promise that God—through the power of His love that connects heaven and earth—will help us, guide us, bless us, protect us, and, despite harrowing times, bring us safely to shore—safely back home.

Has He not promised, “Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers” (D&C 112:10)?

I know God our Heavenly Father lives. We are His children—His greatest creation. I know that Jesus Christ is the literal Son of God—that He lives and loves and forgives and helps and is close to each one of us. He is our Friend. I know that. I know He is my friend. I have a personal and sacred witness of that fact. I know He is your friend also. I know that each of you can obtain a personal witness of that fact—and, when you do, it will give you more strength and direction in your life than you can imagine. Seek it. Find it.

I know that God’s plan is to help all of us progress and eventually receive a fullness of

joy. He helps us learn the truth. He helps us make promises to obey those truths. He helps us keep those promises. When we do all we can and trust Him to do the rest, He will. I testify that there is a connection between heaven and earth. It is real. It applies to all people. It is available to you. I know it, and you can know it, too. God can and will reach down to you.

Jesus learned and believed in His Father’s plan. He promised to do His part in fulfilling that plan—and through His overwhelming love for all of us, He fulfilled His part of that plan despite the unspeakable agony He was called on to bear. He was true and faithful to His promise. He knows what it is like to cry out for help. He hears our cries. I know He fulfilled His preparations unto the children of men through His atoning sacrifice. I know He lives. I know His love, His power, His friendship, His help. I know this is His Church and that Gordon B. Hinckley is His mouthpiece on the earth today. I leave my love and blessings with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.