

The Prince of Peace: “Peace I Give unto You”

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It is a privilege to be with you at a fireside this evening. I have pondered what message would be helpful and meaningful for you in your life at this special time of learning and preparation for the future. May the Spirit be with us as we discuss some gospel teachings is my prayer.

To Strengthen Our Faith

President Spencer W. Kimball, in a 1966 talk entitled “Tragedy or Destiny,” said:

I am positive in my mind that the Lord has planned our destiny. We can shorten our lives, but I think we cannot lengthen them very much. Sometime we’ll understand fully, and when we see back from the vantage point of the future, we shall be satisfied with many of the happenings of this life which seemed so difficult for us to comprehend.

We knew before we were born that we were coming to the earth for bodies and experience and that we would have joys and sorrows, pain and comforts, ease and hardships, health and sickness, successes and disappointments; and we knew also that we would die. We accepted all these eventualities with a glad heart eager to accept both the favorable and unfavorable. We were undoubtedly willing to have a mortal body even if it were deformed. We eagerly accepted the chance to come earthward even though

*it might be for a day, a year, or a century. Perhaps we were not so much concerned whether we should die of disease, of accident, or of senility. We were willing to come and take life as it came and as we might organize and control it, and this without murmur, complaint, or unreasonable demands. We sometimes think we would like to know what is ahead, but sober thought brings us back to accepting life a day at a time, and magnifying and glorifying that day. [Spencer W. Kimball, “Tragedy or Destiny,” *Improvement Era*, March 1966, pp. 216–17]*

Ten years ago I was left alone to ponder this very idea in the stark white, sterile environment of a hospital room. My dear wife, Mary, had just been wheeled away to have an operation. My first response was to pray for her to be returned to me alive and well. My first prayer was almost one of a demand for her return because of the good life she had lived, her husband and children needed her loving care, and because in some way, because of our lives of service, her return to health was a debt owed

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us. Upon concluding the first prayer a heavy feeling lay upon me. There was not the feeling of peace, comfort, or reassurance I had anticipated. What was wrong? Why hadn't I been comforted? Why did I still have so much fear?

After a few minutes of apprehension and deliberation, I knelt to pray again for a second time. This time, however, my prayer was one of acknowledging the Lord's hand in our lives, giving thanks for the many blessings we had received together as companions in over twenty years of marriage, and expressing that I would accept the outcome of the operation to be in God's hands and that his will would be done. After concluding the prayer, I was ready to accept the will of God as it affected Mary's life and mine.

At the conclusion of the prayer a sweet, comforting spirit of peace rested upon me—not because I was assured of Mary's safe return to health, but because of the assurance that I would accept my Heavenly Father's will and trust in him and in his son Jesus Christ to be given the strength to meet the trials of this mortal probation.

After a few more minutes of reflection, I felt the need of more spiritual strength. I reached for my Bible that was on the bed stand and casually thumbed through it, stopping at the book of Job, and began to read, preoccupied at first and then studying more and more intently because my searching questions were being answered.

The book of Job is a profound poem, yet hard to understand, outlining the challenges of life. Job was a good man, almost perfect. One day Satan appeared before God to tell him of the sinful ways of his children on earth. God said to Satan, "Did you notice my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him—a perfect and an upright man who never sins" (see Job 1:8).

Then Job was tested in similar ways that we must be prepared to be tested in this mortal probation: (1) physical possessions (house, cattle, children); (2) physical health (boils from

head to toe); (3) mental health (depression): "Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I [was born]? I should have slept: then had I been at rest" (Job 3:11, 13), "So that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life" (Job 7:15); and (4) false accusations from friends who told Job he must deserve his pain and tribulations as God's punishment for his sins. Job's wife urged him to curse God, even if it meant he would be struck dead. But Job did not let these events destroy his testimony.

"In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:22). As I studied Job in the hospital room, I found the key to enduring the trials and tribulations of this life is not to place blame on God the Father or his son Jesus Christ. Our trials and tribulations must be used to strengthen our faith. Job testified, "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold" (Job 19:26–27).

Elder Orson F. Whitney wrote:

No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven. [Quoted by Spencer W. Kimball, "Tragedy or Destiny," p. 211]

Being human, we would expel from our lives physical pain and mental anguish and assure ourselves of continual ease and comfort, but if we were to close the doors upon sorrow and distress, we might be excluding our greatest friends and

benefactors. *Suffering can make saints of people as they learn patience, long-suffering, and self-mastery.* [Spencer W. Kimball; *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1972), p. 98]

After a few hours my sweetheart was returned to the hospital recovery room—our crisis now a learning experience. I have often pondered what I would have done if she had departed this frail existence to leave me alone in this cold and dreary world without her love.

Trust in the Lord

What are you going to do when faced with a tragedy? Can you prepare yourself and learn from Job, too? What is the real meaning of “If ye are prepared, ye shall not fear” (D&C 38:30)? What preparations must you make in order to be comforted in times of trial and tribulation?

You must learn to “trust in the Lord with all thine heart” (Proverbs 3:5), for “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). The Savior is the Prince of Peace. What beautiful words of hope, peace, and comfort.

The hymn “How Firm a Foundation” teaches us:

*In every condition—in sickness, in health,
In poverty’s vale or abounding in wealth,
At home or abroad, on the land or the sea—
As thy days may demand, so thy succor shall be.*

*Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not dismayed,
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid.
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.*

*When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not thee o’erflow,*

*For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

*The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake!*
[Hymns, 1985, no. 85; emphasis added]

I am touched this evening to have in attendance a father of seven children whose sweetheart passed through the vale after a sudden illness just a few weeks ago—sweet Linda, thirty-two years of age, a devoted daughter, wife, and mother, taken home to our Father in Heaven for some inexplicable reason. The funeral was beautiful as Linda’s husband, daughter, and parents spoke of her love and talents. No one charged God foolishly. The testimonies and examples were powerful and strengthened our faith.

Individually, we should thank God for the examples of those about us who battle and conquer daily challenges that are intense, real, and continuing. There are some persons who in our human eyes seem to have more than their share of trouble, as we measure, but with God’s help they are made special. They will not break. They will not yield. [Marvin J. Ashton, “Adversity and You,” *Ensign*, November 1980, p. 60]

Now, we find many people critical when a righteous person is killed, a young father or mother is taken from a family, or when violent deaths occur. Some become bitter when oft-repeated prayers seem unanswered. Some lose faith and turn sour when solemn administrations by holy men seem to be ignored and no restoration seems to come from repeated prayer circles. But if all the sick were healed, if all the righteous were protected and the wicked destroyed, the whole program of the Father would be annulled and the basic principle of the gospel, free agency, would be ended. [“Tragedy or Destiny,” pp. 180–210]

Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. [Job 1:22]

He that is faithful in tribulation, the reward of the same is greater in the kingdom of heaven.

Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation.

For after much tribulation come the blessings. [D&C 58:2–4; emphasis added; see also 103:12]

If we say that early death is a calamity, disaster, or tragedy, would it not be saying that mortality is preferable to earlier entrance into the spirit world and to eventual salvation and exaltation? If mortality be the perfect state, then death would be a frustration, but the gospel teaches us there is no tragedy in death, [if we die in faith]. [“Tragedy or Destiny,” p. 179]

“He that hath faith in me to be healed, and is not appointed unto death, shall be healed” (D&C 42:48). Apparently the Lord did not consider death always a curse or tragedy, for he said: “Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord” (D&C 63:49).

Life goes on and free agency continues, and death, which seems such a calamity, [is part of an eternal] blessing.

. . . I am grateful that even through the priesthood I cannot heal all the sick. I might heal people who should die. I might relieve people of suffering who should suffer. I fear I would frustrate the purposes of God.

. . . Suffering can make saints of people as they learn patience, long-suffering, and self-mastery. The sufferings of our Savior were part of his education. [“Tragedy or Destiny,” pp. 179, 211, 210]

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. [Hebrews 5:8–9]

Again the Savior has promised that to worthy members the Holy Ghost would be a comforter in times of sickness and death.

Many have borne witness of the comforting spirit that has attended them in times of sorrow, helping them to find peace and understanding.

A few weeks ago it was my privilege to meet two wonderful women, close friends, who had lost their husbands in a tragic airplane accident. Did I find them in despair and deep mourning? No, indeed. I have never witnessed greater courage and strength. They both bore witness to the fact that they had truly felt the comfort of the Spirit, that they knew there was a purpose in the call that had been given to their husbands, and that they had an assurance that all would be well with them and their families as they lived close to the Church and kept the commandments of the Lord. [Franklin D. Richards, Conference Report, April 1973, p. 171]

. . . Could the Lord have prevented these tragedies? The answer is yes. The Lord is omnipotent, with all power to control our lives, save us pain, prevent all accidents, drive all planes and cars, feed us, protect us, save us from labor, effort, sickness, even from death. But is that what you want? Would you shield your children from effort, from disappointments, temptations, sorrows, suffering?

The basic gospel law is free agency. To force us to be careful or righteous would be to nullify that fundamental law, and growth would be impossible. [“Tragedy or Destiny,” p. 178]

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4; see also 3 Nephi 12:4; D&C 101:14). “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14:18).

The Holy Ghost is the Comforter. (John 14:26–27; Teachings, pp. 149–150.) This name-title is given to the third member of the Godhead to signify his mission of bringing solace, love, peace, quiet enjoyment, and comfort to the saints. Scriptures setting forth the consolation and encouragement which spring up in the hearts of the righteous by the power of the Holy Ghost frequently speak of him as the Comforter. Moroni, writing of “the visitation of the Holy Ghost,” says that this “Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love.” (Moroni 8:26.) [MD, p. 148]

And in 1 John we learn that “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18).

Many of you in attendance tonight may face a similar test of faith in the future. Will you be prepared? How will you respond? There are so many ways we may be tested: the death of a loved one, the birth defect of a child, an accident paralyzing a loved one, our own illness, failure to reach a goal in life, being single and lonely, being married and experiencing divorce, having friends betray a trust.

Understanding the Vision

Leo Tolstoi’s story of Martin Avdeitch teaches a beautiful lesson on how to deal with sorrow in our life. Martin had experienced a great deal of tragedy in his life. His two oldest children passed away. Later, his wife became ill and died, leaving Martin alone with his little son Kapitoshka, the only bright spot remaining in his life. Then Kapitoshka suddenly became ill with a high fever and died within a few days.

Martin was devastated and had a hard time dealing with the sorrow and tragedies he had encountered. One day an old man came into Martin’s shop and convinced him he must pull himself out of his depression and sorrow. He told him that he must first get a copy of the New Testament and study it. Then he must *turn his thoughts away from himself and attend to the needs of others.*

Martin took the old man’s advice and immediately went out and bought a copy of the New Testament. He found it fascinating—so much so that he often read until the oil burned from his lamp at night.

One evening he pondered over the message found in Luke 7, beginning with verse 44:

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. [Luke 7:44–46]

As he thought about how he had treated others, he fell asleep. He was awakened by a voice telling him that the Savior was coming to visit him the next day.

When morning came, Martin arose early and started his work. He watched out the window of his shop as people passed. While he was working—and watching—he noticed an old soldier who had been hired to clean the snow away. The old soldier looked tired and cold. Martin tapped on the window and motioned him to come in. The old man was nearly frozen. Martin offered him hot food and shelter to warm himself. He also shared with him his feelings about the happiness reading the holy scriptures had brought into his life.

After the old soldier left, Martin once again set about his work in his shoemaking shop. He continued to look out the window for his guest. He soon noticed a young woman who stopped outside his shop to try to bundle her tiny baby to protect him from the cold. She was poorly dressed for the extreme cold outside and had very little protection for the child. Martin invited her in and cared for the baby while the young woman ate some warm soup.

As she left, he provided her with an old coat and enough money to buy a new one. Both mother and baby were warm and protected from the cold when they left for their journey home.

Martin cleaned the dishes and went back to work near the window. It wasn't long before he saw an old woman who had been selling apples. As she set her basket of apples down to adjust a large, awkward sack she was packing, a young boy came by and grabbed an apple. The old woman, having been on her guard from years of experience, grabbed the boy by the scruff of the neck. As the two were struggling, Martin dashed out to help. Through his efforts not only did the old woman and the boy stop their fighting, but by the time they left the boy offered to carry the large sack to the old lady's home, and she rewarded him with a big red apple. They walked together down the street—talking and laughing as they went.

Martin went inside. It was getting late so he cleaned his shop and put his tools away. He thought he saw shadows in the dark corner of the room but decided the dim lamplight was playing tricks on him. He opened the New Testament and began reading and pondering why his guest had not arrived.

Suddenly he heard a voice call out his name, saying, "Martin, Martin, dost thou not know me?"

"Who art thou?" said Avdeitch.

"Even I," whispered the voice again, and out from the dark corner stepped the old soldier. He smiled at Martin—then he was gone.

"It is I," whispered a second voice, and the young woman and her child stepped out from the dark corner of the room. She and the baby smiled at him—then they suddenly disappeared.

"And it is I," whispered a third voice as the old lady and the boy with the apple stepped out, smiled, and were gone.

Martin rubbed his eyes, looked down at where his New Testament had fallen open, and

read: "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in." And further down the page he read: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:35, 40).

Then Martin Avdeitch understood that the vision had come true, and his Savior had in very truth visited him that day, and that he had received him. This story outlines an important way to prepare ourselves to meet a tragedy: by reading the scriptures to strengthen ourselves and by turning our thoughts away from ourselves and attending to the needs of others.

Learning to Love

Another beautiful example is found in the life of Thomas Moore. Why do many of us "go it alone" and deny those who love us most the joy and blessings that come from sharing? The principle of helping one in need is well expressed in the touching love story of Thomas Moore, a famous nineteenth-century Irish poet, who, when he returned from a business trip, found his wife had locked herself in her upstairs bedroom and had asked to see no one. Moore learned the terrible truth that his beautiful wife had contracted smallpox, and her milky complexion was now pocked and scarred. She had looked at herself in the mirror and demanded that the shutters be drawn, and that she never see her husband again. Thomas Moore did not listen. He went upstairs to the darkened room and started to light the lamp. His wife pleaded with him to let her remain in darkness alone. She felt it best not to subject her husband to seeing his loved one with her beauty marred. She asked him to go.

Moore did go. He went downstairs and spent the rest of the night in prayerful writing. He had never written a song before, but that night he not only wrote words but also composed music. As daylight broke, Moore

returned to his wife's darkened room. "Are you awake?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "but you must not see me. Please don't press me, Thomas."

"I'll sing to you then," he said. Thomas Moore sang to his wife the song that still lives today.

*Believe me, if all those endearing young charms,
Which I gaze on so fondly to-day:
Were to change by to-morrow, and fleet in my arms,
Like fairy-gifts fading away,*

Moore heard a movement in the corner of the darkened room where his wife lay in loneliness. He continued:

*Thou wouldst still be adored, as this moment thou art,
Let thy loveliness fade as it will,
And around the dear ruin each wish of my heart
Would entwine itself verdantly still.*

The song ended. As his voice faded, Moore heard his bride arise. She crossed the room to the window, reached up and slowly withdrew the shutters, opened the curtain, and let in the morning light (from Galen Drake, *Guideposts*, Sept. 1957).

I would like at this time to thank my wife for opening up the shutters and letting in her light and her life and sharing it with me. I would not be here today without her love and companionship.

When we are marred spiritually or physically, our first reaction is to withdraw into the dark shadows of depression, to blot out hope and joy—the light of life that comes from knowing we are living the commandments of our Father in Heaven. This withdrawal will ultimately lead us to rebellion against those who would like to be our friends, those who can help us most, even our family. But worst of all, we finally reject ourselves.

Those who are alone and lonely should not retreat to the sanctuary of their private thoughts and chambers. Such retreat will ultimately lead them into the darkening influence of the adversary, which leads to despondency, loneliness, frustration, and to thinking of oneself as worthless. After one thinks of himself as worthless, he then oftentimes turns to associates who corrode those delicate spiritual contacts, rendering their spiritual receiving antennas and transmitters useless. What good is it to associate with and ask advice of someone who is disoriented himself and only tells us what we want to hear? Isn't it better to turn to loving parents and friends, who can help us reach for and attain celestial goals?

Having almost lost my dear companion a decade ago, I determined not to have any regrets in the remaining years we had together. Whittier wrote of Maud Muller: "For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: 'It might have been!'" (*Maud Muller* [1856], stanza 53).

One of the great tragedies in our lives is to look back and say, "But for my actions, this might have been."

My Regrets

*Are not for things I've done
But for the things I meant to do.
The violets I picked and failed to send;
Words of love I did not give a friend.
The call I should have made at sorrow's door;
Comforts that I could have sent the poor.
The Letter that somehow I did not pen.
Chances lost will never come again.
These are my regrets . . .*
[Mildred T. Pettit]

I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again. [attributed to Stephen Grellet, see Burton Stevenson, sel. and arr., *The Home*

Book of Quotations (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1934), p. 1493]

It has been said that each of us has enough strength to endure another’s tragedies, tribulations, and sorrows. We all know that in this mortal probation we must prepare for tragedies that may directly affect our lives in a number of ways:

1. By having a deep, abiding faith in God our Father and in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, trusting in their mercy in all our doings without charging God foolishly.

2. By being spiritually strong, by being obedient, and by having the Holy Ghost to guide us, comfort us, and bring peace to our souls. This would include regular prayer and study of the scriptures as individuals, companions, and family.

3. By acquiring personal accountability for our actions, not blaming others for our mistakes, failures, opposition, or unexplained trials. Hopefully, walking the gospel road less traveled means we can look back without regrets for our actions. Living gospel principles may bring loneliness in terms of our todays and tomorrows, but it can reward us with blessings of eternity.

4. We need to reach out to those who have experienced a tragedy in their lives. In this way we learn from their example of faith and strength. Also, in the same way the Savior thought of his mother’s care in the closing moments on Calvary, we learn we must reach out and help when we are hurting.

5. The last point on meeting adversity in our lives comes from Victor E. Frankl, author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*. He relates his experience in surviving two concentration camp experiences where all vestiges of human rights were taken from the inmates. Frankl is fond of quoting Nietzsche: “He who has a *why* to live can bear with almost any *how*.” In the concentration camp every circumstance conspires to make the prisoners lose hold of the purpose

of life. All reasons for living are taken away through beatings, fear, poor nutrition, captors, and mental mind games. What alone remains is “the last of human freedoms”—the ability to “choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances.” The prisoners were all average men, but some, at least, by choosing to be “worthy of their suffering” proved, by serving against unsurmountable odds, man’s capacity to rise above outward fates, whether they be deserved or undeserved, explained or unexplained, just or unjust, or from sources unknown—good or evil.

Harold S. Kushner, at the end of his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, said,

In the final analysis, the question of why bad things happen to good people translates itself into some very different questions, no longer asking why something happened, but asking how we will respond, what we intend to do now that it [the tragic event] has happened. [When Bad Things Happen to Good People (New York: Schocken books, 1981), p. 147; emphasis added]

Are you capable of forgiving and accepting in love a world that has disappointed you by not being perfect, a world in which there is so much unfairness and cruelty, disease, poverty, crime, earthquake, flood, and accident? Can you forgive the world’s imperfections and love life because it is capable of containing great beauty and goodness, and because it is the only world we have? Are you capable of forgiving and loving the people around you, even if they have hurt you and let you down by not being perfect? Can you forgive them and love them because there aren’t many perfect people around, and because the penalty for not being able to love imperfect people is condemning oneself to loneliness? Are you capable of forgiving and loving God even when you have found that his world is not perfect and free from pain and travail? He may have let you down and permitted bad luck, wickedness,

and cruelty in his world—permitting some of those things to happen to you. Can you learn to love and forgive him, as Job did, despite the tests of our faith he asks us to endure?

The capability, through repentance, to forgive and the ability to love are God-given gifts to enable us to live our lives fully and to help others live bravely and meaningfully in this less than perfect world.

If we can apply these preparations to meet life's challenges and tragedies, our yesterdays will seem less painful; and you will not be afraid of your tomorrows.

*I know that my Redeemer lives.
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead.
He lives, my ever living Head.
He lives to bless me with his love.
He lives to plead for me above.
He lives my hungry soul to feed.
He lives to bless in time of need.*

*He lives to grant me rich supply.
He lives to guide me with his eye.
He lives to comfort me when faint.
He lives to hear my soul's complaint.
He lives to silence all my fears.
He lives to wipe away my tears.
He lives to calm my troubled heart.
He lives all blessings to impart.*

*He lives, my kind, wise heav'nly Friend.
He lives and loves me to the end.
He lives, and while he lives, I'll sing.
He lives, my Prophet, Priest, and King.
He lives and grants me daily breath.
He lives, and I shall conquer death.
He lives my mansion to prepare.
He lives to bring me safely there.*

*He lives! All glory to his name!
He lives, my Savior, still the same.
Oh, sweet the joy this sentence gives:
"I know that my Redeemer lives."
He lives! All glory to his name!
He lives, my Savior, still the same.
Oh, sweet the joy this sentence gives:
"I know that my Redeemer lives!"
[Hymns, 1985, no. 136]*

In closing, may I give my testimony of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—the Prince of Peace. I testify that if we will put our trust in the Lord and live obediently so that we might have the comforting spirit of the Holy Ghost, we shall find joy and peace in this mortal probation. That we might live our lives in such a way that we may endure to the end and return back into the presence of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.