

# *Living a Reverent Life*

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Being on the Brigham Young University campus with you extraordinary students, our remarkable administration (including my colleague and friend President Cecil O. Samuelson), and the outstanding faculty is always a thrill. Whenever I am here, nostalgically I recall entering BYU as a freshman (now forty-five years ago) and then meeting Diane here four years later. How else could a boy from Hawaii and a girl from southern Alberta, Canada, meet, fall in love, and marry? We both graduated in 1973, and she did it six months pregnant! Facilitating the introductions needed to begin eternal relationships is an important role of this university.

One of the things we deeply enjoy during these devotionals is the performance—the worshipful performance—of a highly accomplished choral group or choir. Today is no exception. It always causes me to think of the story I heard about someone who observed the signboard in front of a church that is not of our faith. Announcing the coming week’s sermon, the sign said, “What Is Hell Really Like?” Along the bottom of the sign, as if in response, it said, “Come Hear Our Choir!” I believe we could put a sign in front of the Marriott Center on devotional days with the bold but accurate

words “What Is Heaven Really Like? Come Hear Our Choir!”

Diane and I have been privileged to observe the influence of BYU around the world. During our worldwide travels and while residing in international locations, we have personally witnessed the impact of performing groups, study abroad students, faculty lecturers, and outreach programs in building relationships of trust for the university and for the Church. Additionally and significantly, graduates of this institution are powerful tools of the Lord, actively and effectively being used to further His kingdom throughout the world.

The good accomplished by this university is extraordinary. Each of us should want to be an active participant in that good. In the “Preface to the doctrines, covenants, and commandments given in this dispensation” (heading of D&C 1), speaking of “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth,” the Lord states that He is “well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not

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individually” (D&C 1:30). I am confident the Lord is well pleased with BYU—“collectively.” Let each of us “individually” be a positive contributor to the Lord’s joy in this institution.

We meet here today in the name of Jesus Christ. We meet under the direction of His holy Apostles, who have given me this assignment to be with you. It is not important that I am the one here. I am simply an ambassador, an envoy. My desire is to appropriately represent the Lord and His Apostles and for the true teacher in this meeting to be the Holy Spirit.

When we gather in a meeting of the Church like this one, we all have an important duty. Most may assume that I have the greatest responsibility: to give a talk that is informative and interesting. I fully accept my role and have prayerfully prepared; however, I share the success of this meeting with each of you. Some may leave inspired, others not. It is really our choice. Each of us has access to the inspiration and revelation that can come to us directly from the Spirit, unfiltered by a speaker. All have different needs and circumstances, and the Spirit can effectively communicate with each of us. Consequently, different messages may be heard today. That is as it should be.

The Doctrine and Covenants states (and this was given by way of commandment) “that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act . . . upon the points of my law” (D&C 43:8). In the next verse it says, “And thus ye shall . . . be sanctified by that which ye have received, and ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me” (D&C 43:9). We share the responsibility to instruct and be edified, but the duty to act is ours individually. And that is the key! When we participate with the intention to act (meaning to improve), the Spirit has full access to our hearts and minds. “And it shall come to pass, that inasmuch as they . . . exercise faith in me”—remember, faith is a principle of action and of power—“I will

pour out my Spirit upon them in the day that they assemble themselves together” (D&C 44:2). That is my hope for this meeting.

I speak of a subject today that may appear to be an unusual one for this setting. I speak of reverence. Upon hearing that word, many may quickly reflect that reverence is merely the act of keeping our children and ourselves quiet when we attend meetings of the Church. I suggest that is not reverence—it is simply one of the ways we demonstrate our reverence. Reverence is to revere, to have a profound love and respect for Deity. In referring to God the Father, latter-day scripture reads: “Before whose throne all things bow in humble reverence, and give him glory forever and ever” (D&C 76:93).

With the Pharisees and Sadducees gathered together, one of them, a lawyer, asked Jesus Christ:

*Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment.*  
[Matthew 22:36–38]

While serving as president of the Church, David O. McKay stated:

*Inseparable from the acceptance of the existence of God is an attitude of reverence, to which I wish now to call attention most earnestly to the entire Church. The greatest manifestation of spirituality is reverence; indeed, reverence is spirituality. Reverence is profound respect mingled with love. It is “a complex emotion made up of mingled feelings of the soul.” [Thomas] Carlyle [the Scottish philosopher] says it is “the highest of human feelings.” I have said . . . that if reverence is the highest, then irreverence is the lowest state in which a man can live in the world. [CR, October 1956, 6; quoting Charles Edward Jefferson, *The Character**

of Jesus (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1908), 312, and Thomas Carlyle, "On Boswell's Life of Johnson" (1832)]

In April 2001 general conference, President James E. Faust said:

*I fear that through prosperity many of us have been preoccupied with what Daniel called "gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know" [Daniel 5:23]. These, of course, are idols.*

*In reverence for the sacred, overarching and undergirding all else is a love and respect for Deity. During most of the world's history, mankind has labored much in idolatry, either worshipping false gods or becoming preoccupied with acquiring the material opulence of this world. ["Them That Honour Me I Will Honour," *Ensign*, May 2001, 45]*

Today I do not wish to only address lofty doctrines and principles, although they are essential in providing a clear vision. I want to be practical. I hope to discuss ways in which each of us can elevate our actions, not just our thinking. Indeed, my aspiration is for each of us to want to live a more *reverent life*—a life reflective of our love for God the Eternal Father and Jesus Christ, His Son and our Savior.

Do not confuse reverence with being quiet. Of course there are times and places when reverence is shown by not speaking or by using hushed tones. Also, in the correct setting and circumstance, being boisterous and reverent are not conflicting. Real reverence is simply not doing anything disrespectful, demeaning, or degrading to the Godhead. It has to do with how we think, how we act, and how we speak. It relates to our integrity and the way we treat one another. The level at which we keep the covenants made in the holy ordinances is a powerful indication of our reverence.

Spencer W. Kimball, while he was Church president, counseled:

*We must remember that reverence is not a somber, temporary behavior that we adopt on Sunday. True reverence involves happiness, as well as love, respect, gratitude, and godly fear. It is a virtue that should be part of our way of life. In fact, Latter-day Saints should be the most reverent people in all the earth. [We Should Be a Reverent People (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 2]*

Those who seek a reverent life have continual and vital opportunities to worship Deity and elevate their reverence. These include public worship, family worship, and personal worship.

### **Public Worship**

Public worship is when we assemble as children of God, as brothers and sisters, as a community of Saints. These meetings are sometimes large like stake or even general conference or are sometimes small like a quorum or Relief Society meeting or a Sunday School class. Our devotional assembly today is a form of public worship. In each of these meetings we pray, we teach, we testify, and we edify—all with the purpose of increasing our understanding of our Father in Heaven, Jesus the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We then have the responsibility to translate that ever-increasing knowledge into wisdom—to continually lessen the gap between what we know and how we live.

Temple worship is a sacred form of public worship because it directly involves ordinances and covenants that connect us with Deity. How connected are you to the temple and your covenants? Are you regularly using this holy form of public worship to strengthen your knowledge and your wisdom? As I have sought to live a reverent life, my prayers have focused more on a desire to live true to my covenants.

The most important of public worship meetings outside the temple is sacrament meeting. In addition to the worshipful activities that

are part of most Church meetings, this service centers on the living ordinance of the sacrament. As we begin and end the meeting and, specifically, in preparation to partake of the holy sacrament, we sing and we pray. Are we full participants? Are our minds and our hearts there or are they somewhere else? Are our smartphones off or do we text and tweet (or, for us older people, email) during the ordinance or during any part of the service? When the speakers speak, especially if they are less polished orators, do we arrogantly disconnect, thinking, “I’ve heard it all before”?

If we are guilty of any of these mistakes, what we are doing is reducing—perhaps eliminating—the ability of the Spirit to communicate with us. And then we wonder why we are not edified by sacrament services and other Church meetings.

Public worship is a magnificent opportunity to develop reverence.

### Family Worship

Public worship should promote family worship. In 1999 the First Presidency counseled parents and children

*to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities. However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform.* [First Presidency letter, 11 February 1999; cited in “Letter Regarding Parents Teaching Children,” *Church News*, 27 February 1999, 3]

Of course these same principles have been repeatedly taught by numerous Church leaders in countless ways over many years.

We live in a world of busyness. Traveling throughout the Church I sometimes privately inquire of local leaders—and these are good

Latter-day Saints—“Are you holding family prayer and family home evening?”

Often I receive an embarrassed look and the explanation “We are so busy. Our children’s school and extracurricular activities, music and other lessons, social schedule, and Church functions keep them almost fully occupied. My spouse and I are tied up with work, Church, and other commitments. We are seldom together as a family.”

The spirit of the First Presidency’s counsel is that if we are so busy doing good things that we do not have time for the essential things, we must find solutions.

When children are raised with reverence—when they see parents whose lives are reverent—they are more likely to follow this divine pattern.

### Personal Worship

Ultimately, reverence is a personal matter. Public worship leads us to family worship, which leads us to personal worship. This includes personal prayer, personal gospel study, and personal pondering of one’s relationship with Deity. “For how knoweth a man the master . . . who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?” (Mosiah 5:13).

Elder D. Todd Christofferson said:

*The importance of having a sense of the sacred is simply this—if one does not appreciate holy things, he will lose them. Absent a feeling of reverence, he will grow increasingly casual in attitude and lax in conduct. He will drift from the moorings that his covenants with God could provide. His feeling of accountability to God will diminish and then be forgotten. Thereafter, he will care only about his own comfort and satisfying his uncontrolled appetites. Finally, he will come to despise sacred things, even God, and then he will despise himself.* [“A Sense of the Sacred,” CES fireside address, 7 November 2004, BYU, Provo]

Whether it be in public, family, or personal worship or in the mundane affairs of life, it is imperative that we speak the names of Deity only with reverence. The Psalmist David wrote, “He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend [meaning reverent] is his name” (Psalms 111:9). President Boyd K. Packer stated, “Irreverence suits the purposes of the adversary by obstructing the delicate channels of revelation in both mind and spirit” (“Reverence Invites Revelation,” *Ensign*, November 1991, 22).

In our worship we often use the names of the Father and the Son. Every prayer, every talk, and every lesson ends with “in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.” For some the use is perfunctory, given without thought or care. Sometimes we hear the phrase slurred in a mindless way as one hurries to conclude and sit down. I, of course, am not suggesting that this important statement of authority be said in some theatrical show—simply that it is sincerely and clearly expressed with our lips, with our mind, and with our heart. That will bring spiritual power to our supplications and teachings.

One of the most powerful reverence lessons in my life occurred nearly thirty-five years ago. After completing our studies at BYU, Diane and I moved to Honolulu to begin the next season of our lives. It turned out to be a long season—twenty-seven years. Only a call from a prophet caused us to leave Hawaii.

The Hawaii Temple—now known as the Laie Hawaii Temple, as there are two temples in Hawaii—was first dedicated by President Heber J. Grant on (appropriately) Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1919. It was the first temple built outside of Utah, except for the temples in Kirtland and Nauvoo. For nearly six decades it served the Saints in Hawaii and, for much of that time, those throughout the Pacific and Asia. In the mid-1970s there was need for the temple to be closed, enlarged, and renovated.

Consequently the temple had need for rededication, which occurred on June 13, 1978.

Presiding at the rededication was the president of the Church, Spencer W. Kimball. With him were his first and second counselors, N. Eldon Tanner and Marion G. Romney. Also attending were Ezra Taft Benson, the president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and others of the Twelve and the Seventy. It is not something you would see in the larger Church of today, having that many of the senior Brethren together for an event away from Church headquarters. But that was our blessing in 1978.

I was a young priesthood leader at the time and was asked by the temple rededication coordinating committee to be responsible for local security and transportation arrangements for President Kimball and his party. I do not want to overstate my responsibilities—they were simply supportive and “behind the scenes.” However, what my assignment did allow was proximity to President Kimball. For a weeklong period that included three days of temple rededication sessions, a solemn assembly, and a large regional conference, I observed the president of the Church close-up. I watched him teach, testify, and prophesy with authority and with power. I saw his tireless effort to minister to “the one,” asking to meet privately with individuals he noticed in meetings or along the way. I witnessed him continually being used as “an instrument in the hands of God” (Alma 17:9). I was profoundly impressed!

At the week’s conclusion we were at the airport for the departure of President Kimball and his associates. Again, emphasizing my limited and supportive role, I share the following. President Kimball came to me to thank me for my meager efforts. Physically he was not very tall, and I am a large man. He grabbed me by my jacket lapels and sharply yanked me down to be at his height. Then he kissed me on the cheek and thanked me. After walking



away a few steps, President Kimball returned. He grasped me in the same way and pulled me down again. This time he kissed me on the other cheek and told me that he loved me. Then he departed.

The year before, a biography of Spencer W. Kimball had been published, written by his son and his grandson. At that time I had obtained it and read it, and I found it interesting. However, after this very personal experience with Spencer Woolley Kimball, I went home from the airport and pulled that thick volume from our library shelf, feeling an intense desire to read it again. Over the next several days—every waking hour I was not otherwise obligated—I was reading and reflecting. You see, I was now reading about someone whom I deeply loved. I was now reading about someone who I knew loved me. I was now reading about someone for whom I would do anything, because I knew whatever he asked would be for my own best good.

Through the exhilaration of that experience I had another experience. This one is too personal to share, but through it I felt deeply ashamed. I comprehended that I did not have that same love and respect—reverence—for Those who matter the most: the members of the Godhead and, specifically, God’s Only Begotten, the Savior and the Redeemer. This motivated me to study His “biography” and, through prayer and fasting and pondering, to know that I was now reading about someone whom I deeply loved. I was now reading about someone who I knew loved me. I was now reading about someone for whom I would do anything, because I knew whatever He asked would be for my own best good.

My dear friends, I testify that this knowledge has made all the difference in my life and in our family. I hasten to add that it has not magically made us without blemish and it has not necessarily made life easy. That would be contrary to God’s plan. But what it has provided is hope—“a perfect brightness of hope” (2 Nephi 31:20). There has never been a thought of giving up, quitting, or retreating. I wish the same for you.

Even as magnificent as you are, within a congregation of this size there is much joy and much pain. Individually you may deeply feel the weight of life’s heavy burdens. Perhaps matters in your family are not as you would wish. Maybe you are struggling with your faith. Possibly you are dealing with something in your past—either something you have done or something that has unfairly been done to you. Some of you may have physical or mental or emotional challenges that seem too much to endure. Whatever your circumstances, living a reverent life will lessen your load. With the message of the oft-sung hymn “I Am a Child of God” in your heart and soul and not simply on your lips, and with a continual reliance on the atoning sacrifice of the Savior Jesus Christ, there can be peace and comfort even in the most difficult of times.

Today can be a pivotal, even historic day in our lives. It can be the day we make the decision and take the disciplined efforts to become more reverent. For some of us it may be by giving up some addictive habit or repugnant practice that is offending God. For others it may be by reprioritizing our lives and making our love for God supreme. A reverent life is worth any price. Indeed, it is the essence of our life’s work. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.