

# *Ultimate Health: God's Gift and Our Personal Responsibility*

KEITH J. KARREN

**B**rothers and sisters, what an incredible opportunity is mine this morning to share with those I love and respect a message that I believe is timely and important. I am aware that George Burns' secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending and have them as close together as possible. This morning I'm feeling humble, as a child. I hope I can also speak with the simple conviction of a child, like the child I heard about just the other day.

A little girl was talking to her elementary school teacher about whales. She had just learned about Jonah and the whale in her Sunday School class. The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though it was a very large mammal, its throat was very small. The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Irritated, the teacher reiterated that a whale could not swallow a human; it was physically impossible.

The little girl said, "When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah."

The teacher asked, "What if Jonah went to hell?"

The little girl replied, "Then you ask him."

Father in Heaven is sending strong spirits like this little girl to earth at this critical time

in the history of the world to build His kingdom and prepare for the Second Coming of the Savior. He needs the leaders of this generation to be healthy, energetic, and powerful. Those leaders are you!

Are you healthy? One of my health science students answered that question with the following quote:

*As a university student, this is a time in my life wherein it is common to live a fairly unhealthy lifestyle. At Brigham Young University this is not often in regard to the excessive use of alcohol, illegal drugs, and promiscuous sexual relations but rather lack of sleep, poor nutrition, heavy workloads, and increased stress.*

Can you relate to that description?

What an incredible time to be on the earth, and with great opportunity comes great responsibility. Our Father knows each of us personally and has provided the gifts to allow us to be as healthy as we need to be to accomplish our individual purposes during this earth life.

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*Keith J. Karren was a BYU professor of health sciences when this devotional address was given on 5 August 2003.*

## Blessings

The examples of a loving Father blessing His children with gifts of health and healing are many. Here are but three:

- The tender mercies of the Father who provides healing plants to His children in Alma 46:40.
- The gift of the stones of light for the Jaredite boats (see Ether 2–3). In her classic book *My Grandfather's Blessings*, Rachel Naomi Remen said:

*This image of a people sailing through heavy seas in search of freedom, steering only by the light that the touch of God kindles in their souls, is a particularly beautiful one for me. . . .*

*. . . I find that the most moving part of the Mormon exodus story is a single line. Despite the challenges and great difficulties of this sea journey, "the wind always blows in the direction of the promised land." I have seen many people spread their sails and catch this wind.*

*There is a grace in life that can be trusted. In our struggle toward freedom we are neither abandoned nor alone. [Rachel Naomi Remen, "Epilogue," in *My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2000), 375–76]*

- My personal blessing of health in my patriarchal blessing is as follows:

*I bless your body that it will be strong and well, and I promise you that if you will live the law of health the destroying angel will pass you by and not harm you, and when diseases are prevalent upon the land they will have no effect upon you and you will be a living testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember this promise, Brother Karren, for it will be fulfilled.*

Like any other opportunity, the gifts that produce good health require personal involvement.

Gifts conjure up thoughts of Christmas. Let's use the power of imagery to put you with your family, gathered about the beautifully decorated tree and the carefully wrapped gifts. Your father planned and chose a special gift for you and knew how important this gift would be to your future. There it was, beautifully covered and waiting for you to open it. But you just didn't get around to opening it—on Christmas Day or the next day or the next. It just stood in the corner gathering dust. How do you think your father would feel? The great potential of the gift could not function on your behalf.

The gift to be opened is the gift of health. The gift of the gospel lived is the gift of health.

## Health and Wellness

What is health and wellness? It depends on who you talk to. Mark Twain said, "Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint" (attributed, in *The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain*, ed. Alex Ayres [New York: Harper and Row, 1987], 97).

*Health* is a very broad term involved in every dimension of our lives. Dr. Edward Taub says:

*Wellness is the dance of life that celebrates infinite and eternal harmony. It is the dynamic activity of caring for your body as the home for your soul; the enriching quality of striving to fulfill your highest potential; and the elevating state of filling your life with love. To achieve wellness is to attain the point of balance where the energies of body, mind, and spirit are so finely attuned to each other that distinctions between them fade away. [Seven Steps to Self-Healing (New York: DK Publishing, 1996), 24; emphasis in original]*

Others define health as an attitude or orientation made up of (1) our basic values and (2) our beliefs about ourselves and the world around us; an inner quality that gives rise to particular health practices but that cannot be reduced to those practices itself.

Here in America we become quite confused by health issues. For example, only in America do people order double cheeseburgers, large fries, and a 32-oz. diet Coke!

Factors that affect our health include, among others: genetics, family and socioeconomic background, diet, exercise, social support, risk-taking behaviors, attitude, and spiritual practices.

New health issues and challenges seem to surface every month. Developing new drugs and procedures is a constant challenge. Yet the real answer is a life centered in the gift of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Does the gift really work? Are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints healthier as a group than most Americans? The answer is a resounding yes!

Well-designed studies continue to conclude that active LDS men and women experience lower mortality rates from all types of disease.

Although the studies are numerous, I will quote just a few. Let me summarize what the authors of *Handbook of Religion and Health* reported, citing from studies by James E. Enstrom and by J. L. Lyon, H. P. Wetzler, and others (Harold G. Koenig, Michael E. McCullough, and David B. Larson, *Handbook of Religion and Health* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2001]):

1. "Mormons had 35% lower mortality from" coronary artery disease (p. 243).
2. "Mormons had fewer cardiovascular diseases and lower mortality rates. . . . Thus, much of the health benefit that Mormons enjoy can be explained by their positive health behaviors and regular religious involvement" (p. 243).
3. "California Mormons experienced only about one-half to three-quarters the cancer death rates of other Californians. This was especially true for cancers of the esophagus, stomach, colon, rectum, pancreas, lung, prostate, bladder, and kidney in men and for cancers of the colon, lung, breast, and uterus (cervix and corpus) in women. A number of these cancer sites were unrelated to smoking" (p. 303).

My own colleague in the Department of Health Science, Dr. Ray Merrill, with Dr. Stirling

Hilton of the Department of Statistics, conducted a study on differences in life expectancy between LDS and non-LDS in Utah for the years 1994 to 1998. They found that at every age group LDS men and women live longer and have a higher survival percentage than non-LDS men and women.

These data are for all Latter-day Saints. If only the active LDS population were studied, the differences would be even more profound.

How then does religion, and specifically the LDS religion, have such a positive impact on health? Health lies at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is not just physical well-being. Rather, it encompasses the whole person: physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. Our Savior is the source of all health and the source of an abundant life.

His gospel-religion (from *ligare*, a Latin term meaning "binding man to God") protects health through

- social integration and support
- more concern for others, less prejudice, and more forgiveness
- developing a personal relationship with Deity
- providing a framework of meaning by which to make sense of life
- enhancing mental health
- promoting specific patterns of personal lifestyle

A powerful example of this last point is section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In 1833 the Prophet Joseph, upon initial motivation from Emma, inquired of the Lord concerning health. What he received from the Lord was a revelation on good health. Scientific evidence to support section 89 was well over 100 years away. What a testament the Word of Wisdom is that the Lord loves His children deeply and is personally concerned about their health.

Science today has developed a theoretical model describing how religion affects physical

health. Observe how religion positively affects mental health, social support, and health behaviors to reduce the development of the diseases listed.

Living the gospel of Jesus Christ, then, can make our lives longer, healthier, and happier.

In April 1876 President Joseph F. Smith observed that the fruits of the Latter-day Saint religion “are flavored with the sweets of heaven, and they impart health and life to the soul” (*GD*, 92; also *JD* 18:276). Some 80 years later, President Ezra Taft Benson stated that “to be truly fit, truly equal to the demands of life, requires much more than bodily strength. It involves the mind and the training of the mind, the emotions and their use and control. Yes, and it involves the soul and the spiritual growth, too” (*TETB*, 239; also *So Shall Ye Reap*, comp. Reed A. Benson [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1960], 140).

These prophets of God understood a great truth of life—that total health is the product of an intricate and intimate connection between mind, body, and spirit. To be truly healthy is to value and nurture each of these important ingredients of the human soul.

As Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “Jesus, as the great physician, came to heal the spiritually sick—all of us” (“*A More Excellent Way*”: *Essays on Leadership for Latter-day Saints* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967], 64). That the Savior and the Church can offer spiritual healing has been commonly accepted throughout the ages. What is new about scientific curiosity is the unexpected finding that religion itself heals *physically*.

Religion energizes our spirits, and that greatly affects our emotions, a very important part of health. Dr. Candace Pert, an internationally known scientist who, by her discovery of the opiate receptor site in the brain, set medical science in the direction of understanding that it is our emotions and their biological components that establishes the crucial link between mind and body, stated:

*For me the key concept is that the emotions exist in the body as informational chemicals, the neuropeptides and receptors, and they also exist in another realm, the one we experience as feeling, inspiration, love—beyond the physical. The emotions move back and forth, flowing freely between both places, and, in that sense, they connect the physical and non-physical. . . . We know that the way health occurs in the physical body has to do with the flow of the biochemicals of emotion. My work has taught me that there is a physical reality to the emotions. [Candace B. Pert, *Molecules of Emotion: Why You Feel the Way You Feel* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 307]*

When the servants of God teach us about health and healing, however, the message has a grander scope than just those things physical. Elder Malcolm S. Jeppsen, a practicing physician for more than 40 years and at the time a member of the Seventy, said in general conference in April 1994:

*Physicians do not cure patients. This marvelous and complicated machine we call the human body has built into it its own wonderful healing mechanism. All a physician can do is to provide a good healing environment.*

*I soon learned in my medical practice that the ultimate healing process for an injured or sick body was already provided by our Heavenly Father. I also learned that a patient's attitude has much to do with healing. Those who would rely on Heavenly Father and exercise faith in the power of priesthood often enjoyed faster recoveries. [“A Divine Prescription for Spiritual Healing,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 17]*

Created after the image of a divine Father, the human body can be conceived of as a self-healer, endowed with an internal supply of chemicals and hormones that maintain and enhance health. Activated by the power of the priesthood, the immune system can heal. The spirit can mobilize the body as it absorbs the lessons of mortality. As Elder Orson F. Whitney told early members of the Church:

*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.* [Quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 98]

Western medicine regards disease and death as a dastardly enemy to be fought with all resources possible. Wonderful people do suffer and die. However, Elder Malcolm S. Jeppsen pointed out the importance of recognizing the Lord's will when he said:

*The Lord has given a condition for healing blessings: "He that hath faith in me to be healed, and is not appointed unto death, shall be healed" (D&C 42:48; emphasis added). Even when a person relies in faith on the Lord for blessings, if it is his or her appointed time to die, there will not be restoration of health. Indeed, "death [must come] upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator" (2 Ne. 9:6). ["Divine Prescription," 17]*

President Spencer W. Kimball strengthened this position, adding:

*Bones can be straightened, germs can be killed, sutures can close wounds, and skillful fingers can open and close bodies; but no man yet has found a way to actually heal. Man is the offspring of God and has within him the re-creating power that is God-given. [TSWK, 508]*

We have discussed the impact of religion in general and the gospel of Jesus Christ on health. More specifically, what are these gifts from a loving Father in Heaven that have such a profoundly positive effect on health?

### 1. Faith

Faith is the assurance we have of things not seen. Faith protects health and promotes healing by strengthening the body against the physical changes that can accompany stress. In the same way it can even affect the course of a disease. A review of studies confirms the power of faith over physiological processes (see "More Than Just Placebo: Review Confirms 'Healing' Effects," *New Sense Bulletin* 16, no. 8 [May 1991]: 1–2). Faith has been shown to influence microbes, plants, animals, and human beings, even from a distance. These studies, combined with personal experiences, have resulted in a growing appreciation of faith among members of the medical community.

### 2. Social Support and Relationships

Researchers who conducted a nine-year study of more than 7,000 California residents were able to identify a single factor that most often led to good health and long life: the amount of social support a person enjoys. They concluded that people with social ties—regardless of their source—lived longer than people who were isolated. And "people who have a close-knit network of intimate personal ties with other people seem to be able to avoid disease, maintain higher levels of health, and in general, to deal more successfully with life's difficulties" (S. Leonard Syme, in Emrika Padus and the editors of *Prevention* magazine, *The Complete Guide to Your Emotions and Your Health: New Dimensions in Mind/Body Healing* [Emmaus, Pennsylvania: Rodale Press, 1986], 83–84).

### 3. Marriage and Families

Not only does the family bring spiritual rewards, but it has a strong influence on the health of all members of the family. We know from scientific research that members of weak, stressed families have characteristic health problems; members of strong, healthy families most often enjoy good health; and parents have

a tremendous influence on the health and development of children in the family.

Statistics from a multitude of studies show the same thing: happy marriage dramatically increases life expectancy. In fact, a man who marries can expect to automatically add about nine years and seven months to his life (see Jo Ann Tooley and Lynn Y. Anderson, “Living Is Risky,” *U.S. News and World Report* 104, no. 3 [25 January 1988]: 77). One researcher went so far as to say that “some of the increased death rates in unmarried individuals are astounding, rising as high as *ten times* the rates for married individuals of comparable ages” (James J. Lynch, *The Broken Heart: The Medical Consequences of Loneliness* [New York: Basic Books, 1979], 38; emphasis added). The researcher then sums up: “The overall death rate for divorced individuals in the United States is almost double that of married individuals” (p. 40).

#### 4. Altruism—Serving Others

A group of studies done on altruism found that people who care for others are physically, emotionally, and mentally healthier than those who concentrate more on their own needs. Many researchers believe that altruism is an inborn characteristic intended to help boost health and longevity. The Paradoxical Commandments by Kent M. Keith were originally published by Harvard Student Agencies in 1968 and were often called “The Ten Commandments of Leadership.” Mother Teresa so admired how they summed up the power of altruism that she had a version entitled “Anyway” inscribed on the wall of her children’s home in Calcutta. Here is a version called “The Final Analysis”:

*People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered;  
Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;  
Be kind anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies;  
Succeed anyway.*

*If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;  
Be honest and frank anyway.*

*What you spend years building, someone may destroy overnight;  
Build anyway.*

*If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;  
Be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;  
Do good anyway.*

*Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough;  
Give the world the best you’ve got anyway.*

*You see, in the final analysis, it is all between you and God;  
It was never between you and them anyway.  
[www.inthefinalanalysis.com]*

#### 5. Healthy Life Perception

To know who we are and why we are here is essential to good health. Goethe declared: “The greatest evil that can befall man is that he should come to think ill of himself.” Marianne Williamson reminds us who we are in a quote from her classic book *A Return to Love*:

*“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.” We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you.*

*We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

[Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A COURSE IN MIRACLES* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996), chapter 7, section 3, 190–91]

#### 6. Humor and Laughter

Further research on laughter has revealed what may be one of its most important benefits: it apparently enhances the immune system. Laughter appears to boost the production of chemicals that enhance immunity, and it suppresses the hormones that weaken immunity (the stress hormones). Psychologist Robert E. Ornstein and physician David Sobel point out, “When confronted with a threatening situation, animals have essentially two choices: to flee or to fight. Humans have a third alternative: to laugh” (*Healthy Pleasures* [Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1989], 218).

#### 7. Hope

Recently a photo entitled *The Hand of Hope* was sent to me that typifies hope. The tiny hand of 21-week-old fetus Samuel Alexander Armas, who had spina bifida, emerges from the mother's uterus to grasp the finger of Dr. Joseph Bruner, as if thanking the doctor for the gift of life. Little Samuel's mother said they “wept for days” when they saw the picture. She said, “The photo reminds us my pregnancy isn't about disability or an illness, it's about a little person.” (Photo taken by Michael Clancy at surgery performed at Vanderbilt University Medical Center on August 19, 1999; see [www.michaelclancy.com](http://www.michaelclancy.com) and “Hand of Hope” at <http://urbanlegends.about.com>.)

A report published in *Medical World News* claimed that “hope can play an important role in vulnerability to disease, the course of illness, and possibly in determining whether a patient

lives or dies” (“Studies Show Hope Can Play Role in a Patient's Risk, Illness, Death,” *Medical World News* 25, no. 11 [11 June 1984]: 101). Norman Cousins is perhaps best known for his research into what he called “the biology of hope.” He explained that *hope* is actually tremendous *expectation* and that it has powerful influence on the human body (see *Head First: The Biology of Hope* [New York: Dutton, 1989]).

Of the Lord Jesus Christ, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

*In and through and by and because of him we and all men have a hope of peace in this life and eternal glory in the world to come. He is our Hope. Without him we would have no hope of immortality, no hope of eternal life, no hope of the continuation of the family unit, no hope of eternal progress, no hope of exaltation, no hope of any good thing. All the hopes of all the righteous of all the ages center in him. [The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 183–84]*

#### 8. Spirituality

“Spirituality is . . . the consequence of a succession of right choices” (Dallin H. Oaks, *Pure in Heart* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988], 123).

“The spiritual is . . . the deepest sense of belonging and participation. . . . Spirit is an essential need of human nature” (Rachel Naomi Remen, “On Defining Spirit,” *Noetic Sciences Review*, no. 8 [autumn 1988]: 7). Spirituality buffers stress, making us better able to resist and fight disease. Healing is made possible by the Light of Christ because, as President David O. McKay wrote:

*Man is a spiritual being, a soul, and at some period of his life everyone is possessed with an irresistible desire to know his relationship to the Infinite. . . . There is something within him which urges him to rise above himself, to control his environment, to master the body and all things physical*

and live in a higher and more beautiful world. [True to the Faith, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 244]

One of the reasons spirituality impacts physical health is that people with a deep sense of spirituality stop focusing on themselves and start focusing on others—an attitude that promotes health in general. As the Savior taught, “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39).

### 9. Forgiveness

Forgiveness—and the failure to forgive—affects not only the mind and the spirit but the body. When we don’t forgive, the body pumps “high-voltage” chemicals into the bloodstream. They include chemicals like adrenaline, noradrenaline, and cortisone. As these chemicals build up in the bloodstream, the body literally become a rapidly ticking time bomb. The heart pounds in the chest like a sledgehammer. The muscles of the neck and shoulders gradually tighten. Abdominal pains develop.

If the situation continues unchecked, the body pays the price. The person who fails to forgive becomes a candidate for gastric ulcers, gastritis, irritable bowel syndrome, and tension/vascular headache.

Forgiveness reverses the process. Anger and resentment dissolve. The body stops pouring high-voltage chemicals into the bloodstream. The heart rate drops. Muscle tension eases. The healing begins.

Without forgiveness, we are constrained; when we forgive, we become free. Studies reveal:

- *People who are more forgiving report fewer health problems.*
- *Forgiveness leads to less stress.*
- *Forgiveness leads to fewer physical symptoms of stress.*
- *Failure to forgive may be more important than hostility as a risk factor for heart disease.*

- *People who blame other people for their troubles have higher incidences of illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and cancers.*
- *People who imagine not forgiving someone show negative changes in blood pressure, muscle tension, and immune response.*
- *People who imagine forgiving their offender note immediate improvement in their cardiovascular, muscular, and nervous systems.*
- *Even people with devastating losses can learn to forgive and feel better psychologically and emotionally.*

[Fred Luskin, *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2002), xv]

### 10. Prayer

Prayer signals a commitment to a set of moral and ethical values; it is a signpost of spirituality and is at the core of most spiritual experiences. Though mortals have been praying for thousands of years, Elder Neal A. Maxwell points out, “Prayer is not something we can clinically diagnose and dissect, giving ready answers for every question about every dimension of this great process” (*All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979], 92). What we *can* do is examine the effects of prayer.

Obviously, prayer exerts tremendous spiritual power. We know that prayer can precipitate miracles: the miracle of forgiveness, the miracle of healing, the miracle of a change of heart. In addition to what prayer does for the soul, though, we know that prayer also has powerful physical benefits. When we pray, we are in a state of relaxed alertness, peace, joy, contentment, and emotional release. During prayer we empty the mind, yet we receive direction. Part of the magnetism of prayer comes from our own belief, our own faith: the powerful suggestion that prayer will work, that something will happen.

Prayer helps us meditate, which also relieves stress.



[Salt Lake City physician] N. Lee Smith says that when patients pray, “they’re focusing on their deepest values and drawing on spiritual power that develops a sense of connectedness and also develops hope. And that has been known to affect medical outcomes. The mind has the ability to heal in ways that are largely unexplainable.” [In Keith J. Karren, Brent Q. Hafen, N. Lee Smith, and Kathryn J. Frandsen, *Mind/Body Health: The Effects of Attitudes, Emotions, and Relationships*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Benjamin Cummings, 2001), 448–49]

Dr. Larry Dossey, a leading medical proponent of prayer, says:

*You think positively. And positive thoughts aren’t confined to your brain. They set in motion a chain of events that has been defined physiologically. We know that expectation and suggestion achieve a lot of fabulous changes in the immune system and probably every other organ in the body.*

*When you get into a meditative, prayer-like, contemplative frame of mind, the metabolism slows down, the immune system is refreshed, blood pressure and heart rates subside, blood lactate level falls, and oxygen consumption and carbon dioxide production are diminished. A lot of changes happen, the result of which is that the body becomes healthier. . . .*

*But most people probably aren’t interested in that level. They want to know, “When I pray, does it work or not?” I think that if you look at the evidence, you can resoundingly say, “Yup! This has a healthful effect and here’s the laboratory proof.” [Peter Barry Chowka, “Prayer Is Good Medicine: An Interview with Larry Dossey, M.D.,” *Yoga Journal*, no. 129 (July/August 1996): 63–64; emphasis in original; also “Larry Dossey, MD: The Interview by Peter Barry Chowka,” <http://members.aol.com/pbchowka/dossey2.html>]*

## Conclusion

The key to good health, then, is to immerse ourselves totally in the gospel of Jesus Christ and strike a balance of life’s dimensions. We

then draw close to the Savior and become more like Him. Helaman 5:12 gives us that direction:

*And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.*

President Howard W. Hunter invited us all “to live with ever more attention to the life and example of the Lord Jesus Christ [and to] treat each other with more kindness, more patience, more courtesy and forgiveness (“Exceeding Great and Precious Promises,” *Ensign*, November 1994, 8).

In a recent stake conference in Highland, Utah, President Merrill Bateman promised the stake members that they can become more like Christ if they would do the following each day:

1. Pray to the Father morning and night, then listen and meditate.
2. Study His scriptures at least 10 minutes per day and learn of Him.

President Benson added another promise:

*There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path. The scriptures are called “the words of life” (see D&C 84:85), and nowhere is that more true than it is of the Book of Mormon. When you begin to hunger and thirst after those words, you will find life in greater and greater abundance. [“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 7; emphasis added]*

3. Keep His commandments.

4. Perform a service to someone daily.

Spencer W. Kimball taught that “service puts problems in perspective” (*TSWK*, 254).

Dr. George E. Vaillant, Harvard University’s director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, the Study of Healthy Aging, and author of *Aging Well*, enlarged upon this concept. Quoting from a valedictory address by Timothy Coggeshall at the Noble and Greenough School in Dedham, Massachusetts, on June 3, 1987—and giving some credit to E. B. White as well—George Vaillant gives the following:

*Besides my sister, my favorite teacher is a two-inch-tall mouse named Stuart Little. Stuart told the children to remember three important rules:*

*“Be a true friend.*

*“Do the right thing.*

*“Enjoy the glory of everything.”*

*We can imagine him outside now in the sunshine, paddling past us in his tiny birch bark canoe, Summer Memories, heading north, upstream on his quest, traveling light and . . . reminding us that a person who is looking for something doesn’t travel very fast, and waving farewell to his childhood and boyhood, that secure and sun-warmed past that is over and done with and gone for all time.*

*“Yet Stuart knew this:*

*“If a flower blooms once, it goes on blooming somewhere forever.*

*“What is changed is never gone unless we let it go.*

*“You will remember—*

*“And you will be remembered.”* [In George E. Vaillant, *Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life from the Landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002), 324–25]

Do I have a testimony—living knowledge of that of which I speak? The answer is a resounding *yes!*

A number of months ago it was discovered that I had prostate cancer. Before that rude

awakening, I had lived a healthy lifestyle and sought to know the Savior. I also knew that the Lord has a definite timetable for each of us. I had great faith that the right thing would occur.

President Gordon B. Hinckley assures us, “God is weaving his tapestry according to his own grand design. All flesh is in his hands. . . . We have no need to fear. We have no need to worry” (*TGBH*, 288).

I also have an incredible family and a sweetheart that is so tuned to the Spirit. Therefore, my social connectedness was and is great. Through fasting and prayer and exploring the various treatment options, with an excellent physician I made a decision and felt great peace. My spirit told me all would be well, for I still had much to do. With the help of many, I prepared my mind, body, and spirit and have been greatly blessed with excellent results.

Last week I visited my parents’ grave sites in a little cemetery in Taber, Alberta. As I scanned other headstones, I saw the names of several of my now-deceased high school classmates. I know that living the gospel of Jesus Christ is the gift of health and a quality of life.

I conclude with a poem by Antonio Machado:

*The wind, one brilliant day, called to my soul with an aroma of jasmine.*

*“In return for this jasmine odor, I’d like all the odor of your roses.”*

*“I have no roses; I have no flowers left now in my garden. . . . All are dead.”*

*“Then I’ll take the waters of the fountains, and the yellow leaves and the dried-up petals.”*

*The wind left. . . . I wept. I said to my soul, “What have you done with the garden entrusted to you?”*

[“Llamó a mi corazón, un claro día,” LXVIII, *Soledades, Galerías, y Otros Poemas*, translated by Robert Bly in *Times Alone: Selected Poems of Antonio Machado* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 57]

Our Father in Heaven desires us to be joyful and well, to nurture and care for the garden that is entrusted to each of us. He needs a healthy people and has given us the gifts and abilities

to be so. It is our responsibility to open those gifts and use them. May we do so, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, the author of all health and healing, amen.