

# Something Higher Than Self

DAVID O. MCKAY

May I say to these students that their presence and especially their inspiring singing add much to the sacredness of this assembly. It is glorious to have several hundred students sing with such spirit and devotion. We are proud of them and of the university from which they come. We appreciate the cooperation of President Wilkinson, members of the faculty, and the students in postponing their regular day's work in school to join in this worship.

It is over fifty years since I stood here for the first time as one of the General Authorities of the Church. I remember well my trembling and humility then at facing such an audience and accepting a position as one of the leaders. The passing of a half a century has made it no easier to face this vast audience and to realize the responsibility that one holds in discharging such a responsibility. This morning, as then and during the intervening years, I solicit your sympathy and your prayers.

A year has passed since we met on such an occasion. In behalf of the First Presidency I bid you welcome, not only those who are here in the Tabernacle, the Assembly Hall, and other surrounding halls but also the vast audience listening in over radio and television. We are very happy indeed that you are taking time

out to participate in the general conference of the Church.

We extend welcome especially to the 31,817 converts of the Church during this past year. That group alone will constitute six stakes of five thousand each. We bid you welcome and trust that you, with all others listening in, will realize the added responsibility that is yours as you assume the responsibility of membership in the Church of Christ.

We wish to commend the missionaries in the stakes and in the field who have been instrumental in bringing these added numbers to the Church of Christ—six new stakes, and more than that if we limit the number to three thousand each.

*And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!*  
[D&C 18:15]

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*David O. McKay was the president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this general conference address from 4 April 1958 was broadcast from a tape recording to the BYU campus assembly on 12 October 1965.*

And as you bring many souls, how much joy you will experience. We commend those who have been diligent during the past year in carrying the message of glad tidings to so many people.

I shall not take time to report the advance in priesthood work, in auxiliary work, and in other phases of the Church, but you may feel gratified indeed with the work of the past year.

It has been difficult for me to put even in outline the message that I have had in my heart for the people of the Church and the people of the world. There is a saying by Paul that "to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

Carnal relates, as you know, to the physical. It includes the sensual. But we have in mind this morning the physical surroundings and our animal instincts, the anger that comes to us, the unpleasant words that are spoken—making life unpleasant rather than emphasizing the spiritual side, the real side of our nature.

The text was suggested several weeks ago, particularly emphasized at that time, by a report that came to me of unpleasantness in a home, and I wondered why we cannot emphasize spiritual attitudes in our homes instead of unpleasant attitudes; why, having before us all the admonitions of the Lord, all the opportunities offered by the Church, we cannot express spiritual attitudes every day of our lives. What good is religion if it does not make our daily lives better? Why need there be emphasis put upon the carnal side of our natures? True, that is the natural reaction for all animals. But having in our possession the high principles of the gospel as revealed through Christ, why cannot members of the Church at least in the home, in school, and in all their associations emphasize the spiritual side of their natures instead of the carnal side?

I learned through a letter of a condition that I think—so far as members of the Church

are concerned—is absolutely inexcusable. A husband and wife quarreling—the husband demeaning himself to such an extent as to curse at his wife and, in a mad fit of anger, overturn a table spread with dishes—a creature in the form of a man harboring the nature of an animal! A man in such a mental state that the anger itself does him more harm than the condition that aroused his anger, and, in reality, brothers and sisters, he suffers more from the vexation than he does from the acts that aroused that vexation.

I wonder how long it will take us to realize that in matters of temper nothing can bring us damage but ourselves—we are responsible for what helps us and for what injures us—that the harm that each one sustains he carries about with him, and never is he a real sufferer but by his own fault. I think you get that thought, and yet the tendency of each one is to blame somebody else—the wife blaming the husband, the husband blaming the wife, and children finding fault with the parents when the fault lies within themselves. If in the dignity of manhood such a man would cease to magnify his troubles, face things as they really are, recognize blessings that immediately surround him, and cease to entertain disparaging wishes for another, how much more of a man he would be, to say nothing about being a better husband and a more worthy father! A man who cannot control his temper is not very likely to control his passion, and no matter what his pretensions in religion, he moves in daily life very close to the animal plane.

Religion is supposed to lift us on a higher level. Religion appeals to the spirit in man, the real person, and yet how often, notwithstanding our possessing a testimony of the truth, we yield to the carnal side of our nature. The man who quarrels in his home banishes from his heart the spirit of religion. A mother in this Church who would light a cigarette in the home is yielding to the carnal side of her nature. How far below the ideal of the Church!

Any quarreling in the home is antagonistic to the spirituality that Christ would have us develop within us, and it is in our daily life that these expressions have their effect.

Man is making great progress in science and invention—greater perhaps than ever before—but is not making comparable progress in character and spirituality. I read a while ago of a remark of General Omar N. Bradley, formerly the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, who on one occasion said:

*With the monstrous weapons man already has, humanity is in danger of being trapped in this world by its moral adolescents. Our knowledge of science has clearly outstripped our capacity to control it. We have many men of science; too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. Man is stumbling blindly through a spiritual darkness while toying with the precarious secrets of life and death. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.* [Armistice Day address to the Boston Chamber of Commerce, 10 November 1948; emphasis in original]

Our living comes hourly and daily in the home, in our association in business affairs, and in our meeting strangers. It is the attitude of the person during the daily contacts by which we show whether we are appealing to the carnal or to the spiritual within us and within those with whom we associate. It is a daily matter. I do not know whether we can get the thought over or not. And it is within the power of each one, especially members of the Church who make such pretensions. You cannot imagine a real, true Christian, and especially a member of the Mormon Church, swearing at his wife. Why, it is inconceivable that such a thing as that could be in a home, and especially with children around. How

can anyone justify parents quarreling in front of children! In the instance to which I have referred, the man (I should say the brute) struck his wife. Such a thing should never be. That is out of the life of Church members.

Christ has asked us to develop the spiritual within us.

Man's earthly existence is but a test as to whether he will concentrate his efforts, his mind, and his soul upon things that contribute to the comfort and gratification of his physical nature or whether he will make as his life's purpose the acquisition of spiritual qualities.

*Every noble impulse, every unselfish expression of love, every brave suffering for the right, every surrender of self to something higher than self, every loyalty to an ideal, every unselfish devotion to principle, every helpfulness to humanity, every act of self-control, every fine courage of the soul, undictated by pretense or policy, but the being, doing and living of good for the very good's sake—that is spiritual.* [William George Jordan, "The Crowning Gift in Life," in *The Trusteeship of Life* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1921), 181–82]

The spiritual road has Christ as its ideal—not the gratification of the physical, for he that will save his life, yielding to that first gratification of a seeming need, will lose his life, his happiness, and the pleasure of living at this present time. If he would seek the real purpose of life, the individual must live for something higher than self. He hears the Savior's voice saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Following that voice he soon learns that there is no one great thing that he can do to attain happiness or eternal life. He learns that

*life . . . is made up, not of great sacrifices or duties, but of little things, in which smiles and kindness, and small obligations given habitually, are what win and preserve the heart, and secure comfort.* [Sir Humphry Davy, quoted in *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, vol. 1 of *The Collected Works*

of Sir Humphry Davy, ed. John Davy (London: Smith, Elder, 1839–40), 448]

Spirituality, our true aim, is the consciousness of victory over self, and of communion with the Infinite. Spirituality impels one to conquer difficulties and acquire more and more strength. To feel one's faculties unfolding and truth expanding in the soul is one of life's sublimest experiences.

As Carlyle says:

*The thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest. . . . And I say, if you tell me what that is, you tell me to a very great extent what the man is, what the kind of things he will do is. [Thomas Carlyle, "The Hero as Divinity," in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1840)]*

The man who sets his heart upon the things of the world, who does not hesitate to cheat his brother, who will lie for gain, who will steal from his neighbor, or who by slander will rob another of his reputation lives on a low, animal plane of existence and either stifles his spirituality or permits it to lie dormant. To be thus carnally minded is to be spiritually dead.

On the other hand, keeping in mind our daily vocations, the man who tills the soil, garners his fruit, and increases his flocks and his herds, having in mind making better the world in which he lives, desiring to contribute to the happiness of his family and his fellows, and who does all things for the glory of God, will, to the extent that he denies himself for these ideals, develop his spirituality. Indeed, only to the extent that he does this will he rise above the plane of the animal world.

Years ago we read in school the following from Rudolf Eucken:

*I cannot conceive of the development of a powerful personality, a deep-rooted and profound mind, or a character rising above this world, without his having experienced this divine life. And as surely as we can create in ourselves a life in contrast to pure nature, growing by degrees and extending to the heights of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, we may have the same assurance of that religion called Universal. [Religion and Life (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 24]*

Paul, you will remember, expresses it more specifically:

*But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.*

*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*

*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*

*But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.*

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery [The young man who leaves his home at night having in mind anything that would injure either the character or the life or the reputation of a young woman with whose company he is entrusted is carnal minded instead of spiritual minded.], fornication, uncleanness . . . ,*

*. . . hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions . . . ,*

*Envyings . . . , drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,*

*Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

*And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*

*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit [daily, hourly]. [Galatians 5:15–25]*

It can be done, and it should be done in every home of the Latter-day Saint Church.

With all our boasted civilization there never was a time when spiritual awakening and spiritual ideals were more needed. Civilization has grown too complex for the human mind to visualize or to control. Unless mankind comes to a speedy realization that the higher and not the baser qualities of man must be developed, the present status of civilization is in jeopardy. Life on the animal plane has as its ideal the survival of the fittest—crush or be crushed, mangle or be mangled, kill or be killed. For man, with his intelligence, this is a sure road to anguish and death.

About fifty years ago Lord Balfour, prime minister of Great Britain, delivered a lecture in McEwan Hall at the University of Edinburgh on the subject “The Moral Values Which Unite the Nations.” In an interesting and convincing manner the gentleman presented four fundamental ties that unite the different nations of the world:

1. Common knowledge
2. Common commercial interests
3. The intercourse of diplomatic relationship
4. The bonds of human friendship

The audience greeted his masterful address with a great outburst of applause.

As the presiding officer arose to express his appreciation and that of the audience, a Japanese student who was doing graduate work at the university stood up and, leaning over the balcony, said, “But Mr. Balfour, what about Jesus Christ?”

Mr. Robin E. Spear, to whom Professor George Lang related this incident, brought to our attention this report:

*One could have heard a pin drop. Everybody felt at once the justice of the rebuke. The leading statesman of the greatest Christian empire in the world had been dealing with the different ties that are to unite mankind and had omitted the fundamental and essential bond. And everyone felt, too, the dramatic element in the situation, that the reminder of his forgetfulness had come to him from a Japanese student from a far-away non-Christian country. [Ralph Barrow, “Interpreting Child Welfare Work to the Community—the Private Agency,” Support and Interpretation of Child Welfare Work, *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work* (10–17 June 1925): 132]*

Life, brethren and sisters, is an overflowing river on which one embarks at birth and sails, or is rowed, for fifty, seventy, eighty, or more years. Every year that passes goes into an eternity, never to return; yet each carries with it into the past no personal weakness, no bodily ailment, no sorrow, no laughter, no thought, no noble aspirations, no hope, no ambition: all these with every trait of character, every inclination, and every tendency remain with each individual. In other words, our lives are made up of daily thoughts and actions. We may resolve to let all our sorrows and weaknesses go with the passing time, but we know that every thought and every inclination has left its indelible impression upon our souls, and we shall have to deal with it today.

So live, then, that each day will find you conscious of having willfully made no person unhappy. No one who has lived a well-spent day will have a sleepless night because of a stricken conscience. Daniel Webster once said that the greatest thought that had ever occupied his mind was the realization of this fact:

*There is no evil that we cannot either face or fly from, but the consciousness of duty disregarded. A sense of duty pursues us ever. It is omnipresent,*



like the Deity. If we take to ourselves the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, duty performed, or duty violated, is still with us, for our happiness or our misery. If we say the darkness shall cover us, in the darkness as in the light our obligations are yet with us. We cannot escape their power, nor fly from their presence. They are with us in this life, will be with us at its close; and in that scene of inconceivable solemnity, which lies yet farther onward, we shall still find ourselves surrounded by the consciousness of duty, to pain us wherever it has been violated, and to console us so far as God may have given us grace to perform it. ["The Murder of Captain Joseph White," in *Legal Arguments and Speeches to the Jury*, vol. 6 of *The Works of Daniel Webster* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), 105]

Commenting on this statement by Daniel Webster, Reverend Newell Dwight Hillis said:

*Weighed against conscience the world itself is but a bubble. For God himself is in conscience lending it authority.* ["Conscience and Character," in *A Man's Value to Society: Studies in Self-Culture and Character* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1901), 193]

Mankind needs a spiritual awakening, brethren and sisters. The carnal minded are causing heartaches and threatening the extinction of the race.

But the sun of hope is rising. Thinking men and women are recognizing the need of man's looking up toward the heavens instead of groveling in response to the animal instinct. One man commenting upon this said, "If all the Destroyers of civilization could be eliminated, and if the traits of the rest of us that come from destructive strains could be eliminated, an approach to [the Millennium] some hundreds of years hence is by no means inconceivable." This man, one of the writers of *The Builders of America*, asked:

*Can you imagine what this country would be like if ten or twenty billion dollars a year [that is the amount expended to take care of our criminals] were added to our national income? That would mean \$500 or \$1,000 per family. But the average today, even if we include Henry Ford, is only \$2,500 or \$3,000. What would happen if that sum were increased by 20 or even 40 percent all around? Even if you can imagine the result, do you realize what it would be like to feel no need of locking doors and windows, no fear of leaving your car unprotected, no danger that your wife or daughter would be insulted or you yourself sandbagged if you went out at night, no fear that you would have any uncollectable bills except through accident or unpreventable misfortune, no fear that in a political election there would be any bribery or in politics any graft, and no fear that anyone anywhere was trying to "do" you? Can you imagine all that? It would almost be heaven on earth. Of course it cannot happen [someday it will have to happen]. . . . And if the traits of the rest of us that come from destructive strains could be eliminated, an approach to such a state some hundreds of years hence is by no means inconceivable.* [Ellsworth Huntington and Leon Fradley Whitney, "The Tide of Crime," in *The Builders of America* (New York: William Morrow, 1927), 104–5]

Spiritual awakening in the hearts of millions of men and women would bring about a changed world. I am hopeful, my brethren and sisters, that the dawning of that day is not far distant. I am conscious, as I hope all of you are, that the responsibility to try to bring about such a day rests upon the priesthood of the Church of Jesus Christ and upon the membership and upon husbands and wives and upon children in Mormon homes.

May that message be felt throughout the conference that we are now holding. We cannot just come and meet and talk about good things and then go home and express our feelings, the feelings of our carnal nature.

My faith in the ultimate triumph of the gospel of Jesus Christ assures me that a spiritual awakening must come. It will come through the acceptance of Jesus Christ and obedience to His gospel and in no other way completely. I believe there never was a time in the history of the world when there was such a need for a united, determined stand to uphold Christ and the restoration of the gospel

through the Prophet Joseph Smith as there is today.

God bless you here assembled that we may sense as never before the efficacy of the restored gospel and that we hold as a duty our application of spiritual traits in our daily association with one another in home, in business, and in society, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.