

# *Make God and His Kingdom the Center of Your Life*

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**M**y dear brothers and sisters, it is thrilling to be with you today. I bring you greetings from President Hinckley and the First Presidency. Sister McMullin and I marvel over the goodness of your lives and the potential you represent. It is humbling to realize that Heavenly Father has selected you to come forth in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times.

I should like to tell you a story. If you have already heard something similar, no matter—the moral is worth revisiting. As the story goes, the airline company Air France opened an office in Atlanta, Georgia. Some weeks later, the company's chief officer called the Atlanta office. A receptionist answered and, in her charming Southern accent, said, "Air France."

The proper Frenchman was disturbed. Speaking to the office manager, he said, "We cannot have someone answering the phone 'Air France'; it must be 'Air Frånce'!"

Some weeks later, the company executive called again. The same receptionist answered the phone. She said, "Air Frånce—can I hep ya?"

The moral is clear. It is much easier to dress up the outside than to change what is within. It is easier to put on an appearance than it is to alter one's nature. Today I hope to be helpful in changing our natures, in lifting us above the

things of this world to "a more excellent way" (Ether 12:11).

You are living in a momentous day in the history of this modern world. Much is expected of you. Your interests and challenges run the gamut from the sciences to the humanities, from the newest discoveries to the most ancient studies. Neither solar systems nor DNA escape your inquisitive probing. Furthermore, that which was arduous for your predecessors you now accomplish in nanoseconds. You are at the forefront of change. Such is the nature of your day and time.

Unfortunately there is a darker side as well. Exciting and beneficial advances are often eclipsed by things sordid and sensual. Concerning today, the scriptures speak of false Christs and false prophets; nations at war; kingdoms arrayed against each other; famines, plagues, earthquakes, and hailstorms; even cataclysmic events that will shake the very orbs and powers of heaven (see JS—M 1:29–34).

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On a personal level, the Lord speaks of conditions and dangers besetting His covenant people. We read:

*For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant; They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall. [D&C 1:15–16]*

This, too, is part of your day and time.

In today's world much is said about being *holistic* in one's approach and *empowered* in one's work. Given what we have just considered, if ever a situation demanded a holistic approach, this is it. If ever a generation needed to be empowered, you do! Unfortunately, the way we typically approach life accomplishes neither of these. Allow me to illustrate.

We have all been asked the question "What are you going to be when you grow up?" It is a simple question, usually asked in hopes of pointing us in the right direction. In response, our minds typically turn to such things as education, career, marriage and family, wealth and status, lifestyle, church, and the like. In other words, we are inclined to compartmentalize life, to divide it into seemingly neat segments, each of which is expected to contribute to our overall good. In fact, most of a person's time at this great university is spent sharply focused on one or more of these segments.

But caution is in order. All too often we feel compelled to do everything so we can amount to something. Each segment demands a great deal of personal energy and commitment; each wants to be as important as the other. Soon the battle is with time—time to work it all in—and the day planner or cell phone becomes almost as important as food

and air. In the words of Brigham Young, "You are all the time on the wing, and in such a hurry that you do not know what to do first" (*JD* 15:36; see also *Deseret News Weekly*, 5 June 1872, 248). No wonder we feel a little frantic.

A life divided into compartments risks being overwhelmed by the divisiveness. Priorities can be lost, balance can be surrendered. We can become one of those who "walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god," trusting "in the arm of flesh" to pull him through (D&C 1:16, 19). Our purpose on earth becomes blurred. We no longer have an "eye . . . single to the glory of God" (JST, Matthew 6:22). In the words of the Apostle James, we become as "a double minded man . . . unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8).

Admittedly, it is improbable that we are going to change the course of warring nations. It is unlikely that a BYU graduate is going to stop the tide of nature's destructive forces. Even an outstanding MBA candidate is not going to alter very much the U.S. balance of payments or the rise and fall of the stock market. But there is something every one of us can do to change our world. We can change ourselves. And as we change ourselves, we alter the way the world affects us. This is done under two simple banners—love and kingdom. Here is how it works.

## Love

Visualize the first banner—"Love." The Lord was asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said, "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; see also D&C 59:5). This commandment is at the nexus of all others. Abide by it and every other appetite, passion, or compulsion will yield. As we love God more than anything else, we find that things inimical to His character become unappealing to us. We

do not wish to break the commandments; we strive to keep them. We do not lust after what is forbidden; we shun all evil. Even the desire for fashion and fad is replaced with a simple yearning to be neat and comely. That which we love determines that which we become. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

When I married my dear wife, I knew I would always be number two in her life. This is because she loves God more than she loves me. Over the years my understanding and appreciation for the paramount importance of this “first and great commandment” has deepened. You see, because she loves God more than anything else, she is able to love me more than everything else. How grateful I am that the keeping of this commandment helped her overlook some pretty major deficiencies.

*There is a God in heaven, who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting the same unchangeable God, the framer of heaven and earth, and all things which are in them;*

*. . . He created man, male and female, after his own image and in his own likeness, created he them;*

*And gave unto them commandments that they should love and serve him, the only living and true God, and that he should be the only being whom they should worship. [D&C 20:17–19]*

As we center our love first and foremost in God, the Eternal Father, the capacity emerges within us to love all the works of His hands. For example, no earthly affection or ambition has ever interfered with my wife’s devotion to her husband and family. Our marriage is now in its 40th year. Our lives are filled with adoration for one another. Children and grandchildren adorn our home. Temple covenants protect and preserve us. All of this and so very much more because of this “first and great commandment.”

### **Change yourself! Decide today “I am going to love God more than anything else!”**

Pray for the capacity to do so. Repent of things that stand in the way. Follow the prophet and keep the commandments. Allow your love for God to supersede the styles you wear, the hours you keep, the impressions you give, the grades you receive, the words you speak, even the way you are. As this love grows, changes will emerge. You will become a better neighbor, a more conscientious student, a more honest person, a more devout disciple. Your circle of friends will increase, and your circle of influence will expand. You will also discover that Heavenly Father loves you (see 1 John 4:19). In the words of the Apostle Paul:

*I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,*

*Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:38–39]*

### **Kingdom**

Visualize the second banner—“Kingdom.” Brigham Young lifts our sights to this banner with the words “With us, it is the kingdom of God, or nothing” (JD 5:342). The Lord taught:

*Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . .*

*Behold, I say unto you, that your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*

*Wherefore, seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. [JST, Matthew 6:35, 37–38]*

Our beloved prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, has given luster and direction to these teachings for our day:

*I wish to remind you [as Latter-day Saints] that we are all in this together. It is not a matter of the General Authorities on one hand and the membership of the Church on the other. We are all working as one in a great cause. We are all members of the Church of Jesus Christ.*

*Within your sphere of responsibility you have as serious an obligation as do I within my sphere of responsibility. Each of us should be determined to build the kingdom of God on the earth and to further the work of righteousness. [“An Ensign to the Nations, A Light to the World,” *Ensign*, November 2003, 82; see also JST, Matthew 6:38]*

**The kingdom of God on the earth is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.** It has been established to prepare this earth and its people for the Second Coming of our Lord. Did He not pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10)? Some 14 months after He established His Church once more upon the earth, the Lord said:

*The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth. . . .*

*Wherefore, may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come, that thou, O God, mayest be glorified in heaven so on earth, that thine enemies may be subdued; for thine is the honor, power and glory, forever and ever. [D&C 65:2, 6; see also Daniel 2:31–45]*

Again we have the prophetic words of President Hinckley:

*I believe and testify that it is the mission of this Church to stand as an ensign to the nations and a light to the world. We have had placed upon us a great, all-encompassing mandate from which we cannot shrink nor turn aside. We accept that man-*

*date and are determined to fulfill it, and with the help of God we shall do it. . . .*

*We must never lose sight of our objective. We must ever keep before us the goal which the Lord has set for us. [“Ensign to the Nations,” 82–83; see also D&C 105:5–6, 31–32]*

**The kingdom of God or the Church is made up of two essential parts.** One is the family, the basic unit of the Church and kingdom. It is here that the citizens of God’s kingdom reside. Unlike many definitions in the world today, such a family consists of a man and a woman joined together in marriage as ordained of God. Established and nurtured in this manner, these families become as eternal as the kingdom itself (see D&C 132:19–20).

The other essential part is the priesthood. It houses the oracles and organization of the Church. The power and authority of God originate here. It includes apostles and prophets; keys and callings; truth and scriptures; laws and covenants; quorums, wards, stakes, and the like.

Can you see how these two elements harmonize and complement each other? They are interdependent and interlocking. Can you see how flawed the idea is that one can be without the other? To choose family over priesthood is preposterous, for without priesthood there is no eternal family. To choose priesthood over family is folly, for its powers and purpose are to save those residing in the family circle. Complications that arise are the outgrowth of man, not evidence of an imperfect design. President John Taylor observed:

*What is the first thing necessary to the establishment of his kingdom? It is to raise up a Prophet and have him declare the will of God; the next is to have people yield obedience to the word of the Lord through that Prophet. If you cannot have these, you never can establish the kingdom of God upon the earth.*

[JD 6:25; see also John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom*, sel. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 214]

Harmonizing these elements in the kingdom is neither automatic nor easy. It is, in fact, the essence of our mortal struggle. President Taylor continued:

*We have a great mission to perform—we have to try to govern ourselves according to the laws of the kingdom of God, and we find it one of the most difficult tasks we ever undertook, to learn to govern ourselves, our appetites, our dispositions, our habits, our feelings, our lives, our spirits, our judgment, and to bring all our desires into subjection to the law of the kingdom of God and to the Spirit of truth.* [JD 9:12; see also *Gospel Kingdom*, 214]

We are a covenant-making and a covenant-keeping people. This is the way to the harmony we seek. It is the way of Heavenly Father and His Holy Son. From baptism to Judgment Day, every one of us is expected to keep his or her covenants—whether in school, in the workplace, at a social, or at church.

This kingdom is not a Sunday-only experience. It is not limited to callings or meetings. This Church is not like a set of clothes, used to dress up on the Sabbath then laid aside for more casual attire as quickly as possible. The Church or kingdom of God is a way of life—indeed, it is the substance of life. In harmony with our covenants, it should accompany us wherever we go. Live by the couplet

*Build the kingdom—twenty-four, seven.  
It's the surest way to heaven.*

**Change yourself. Decide today “I am going to make the Church and kingdom of God the center of my life!”** Position yourself firmly inside God’s kingdom; allow it to encompass you. When you marry, see to it that your family is established as the basic

unit in the Church and kingdom. As you meet the demands of life, rather than leaving the Church and stepping into the world, take the kingdom of God with you wherever you go. Allow its purposes and objective to circumscribe all that you do. For example, in pursuit of your studies, have more than a degree or a career in mind. See that mastery of a subject better equips you to serve as a father, a mother, a priesthood or sister leader, an example of goodness and virtue among all with whom you associate. Make this the pattern in all your endeavors, be they social or civic or recreational or whatever. We have, after all, covenanted to do so “at all times and in all things, and in all places” (Mosiah 18:8–10; see also D&C 20:37). As we do so, everything else will turn out all right. Said President Hinckley:

*If we are to hold up this Church as an ensign to the nations and a light to the world, we must take on more of the luster of the life of Christ individually and in our own personal circumstances. In standing for the right, we must not be fearful of the consequences. . . .*

*This Church, I submit, is far more than a social organization where we gather together to enjoy one another’s company. It is more than Sunday School and Relief Society and priesthood meeting. It is more than sacrament meeting, more even than temple service. It is the kingdom of God in the earth. It behooves us to act in a manner befitting membership in that kingdom. [“Ensign to the Nations,” 84]*

This great winding-up scene is your day and time. **Beginning today, make God and His kingdom the center of your life.** By doing so, you help cause

- *weak things of the world [to] come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones;*
- *every man [to] speak in the name of God the Lord;*
- *faith [to] increase in the earth;*

- [the Lord's] *everlasting covenant* [to] *be established*; [and]
- [the] *gospel* [to] *be proclaimed . . . unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers.* [D&C 1:19–23]

God is in His heavens. Jesus Christ is His Holy Son, the blessed Redeemer. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God's kingdom on the earth. Of these truths I bear my witness, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.