

Four Lessons from One Life

RUSSELL M. NELSON

President Oaks, brothers and sisters, fellow students, it is an honor to return again to the campus of Brigham Young University. I am grateful for each opportunity I have to be among you. Every time I am privileged to come to BYU, I leave as a better individual. I am always inspired by the students here and by the great members of the faculty. I want you to know of my love and admiration for all of you.

In responding to this request to share my innermost thoughts with you on this occasion, I sense my inadequacies; for I stand before you, not as a speaker or as an entertainer, but solely as a student of the words and works of Deity, and as a servant of him and his children. I am fortified by the realization that each of us is a son or daughter of God, for whose direction I humbly pray.

My background of study and service, to which President Oaks has made reference, has been a most interesting one. Today I should like to distill and discuss the essence of these experiences and entitle that essence “Four Lessons from One Life”—the life I have lived thus far. In sharing these condensations of my own personal views, along with illustrations about each, I will surely be guilty of missing many important things. On the other hand, the effort to reduce all the lessons

learned and conclusions derived into these four topics has been a challenging one—an exercise you might wish to try yourself one day.

The topics of these four lessons are the following; (1) the divine creation of the human body, (2) the reality of the spirit, (3) the power of love, and (4) the dependability and inconvertibility of divine law.

The Divine Creation of the Human Body

In considering the first lesson, entitled “the divine creations of the human body,” I recognize that my study of the medical sciences over the past thirty years has given me an exposure and a bias that would likely be fully shared only by a fellow physician. I suppose no scientist has the opportunity to develop faith in our Heavenly Father quite as uniquely as does the medical scientist who studies the human body as a daily commitment. To me, it is one of God’s greatest creations, and the miracle of it becomes more awesome with each passing

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experience. The fact of your own birth and existence here today is an exciting miracle. As scientists, we don't know how two cells unite to form an embryo, or how primitive cells therein differentiate to become a beating heart or a thinking brain. You possess two cameras for eyes that are infinitely finer than any camera yet invented by man. Your two ears serve as stereophonic receptors better than any produced by man. The fabulous functions of each specific organ bring inspiration to you, I am sure, as they do to me.

One specific illustration comes to mind. In the finest modern hospitals, one may find a large instrument which is used to determine the degree of saturation of oxygen and carbon dioxide in a sample of blood. The result it provides may be known by the physician within about five minutes. Since these instruments have been available, doctors have been able to regulate machines to assist respiration much more accurately than was ever possible before. In each of our bodies there are two such instruments, tiny clusters of cells about the size of a sesame seed that are located in each side of the neck. These tiny organs continuously monitor the same information with respect to oxygen and carbon dioxide, make the analysis, and then send the information up a tiny nerve from these sensing devices in the neck to the brain. The brain, in turn, handles this information and sends stimuli back to the muscles of respiration to regulate when a person inhales and exhales. This is the reason one can't stay under water very long, for when he does, the information that carbon dioxide is building up is perceived by these receptors and sent to the brain, which then drives the body to breathe and thereby eliminate the excess carbon dioxide.

There are many other remarkable protective mechanisms in the body. Have you ever stopped to think about the protective mechanism of the blood that circulates within you? Blood flows through the arteries, veins, and

capillaries at a very brisk pace. It is always there in a fluid state; yet in the event there should be some injury, such as a cut or a laceration, the liquid blood provides a sealing compound to stop the leak. Not only that, but this seal then initiates the very process of healing that wound. I have seen a major artery snipped in two as a result of an accidental injury, with both of the previously bleeding ends sealed shut by virtue of this marvelous protective mechanism which uses the very same elements within the blood that were present in its fluid state.

There are so many examples of the inspiring and incredible qualities of the body to defend itself, to heal itself, that this continues to be an increasingly engrossing and fascinating study. It seems as though there is never an end to the unfolding of miraculous factors which are present in that great gift from our Heavenly Father—that mortal tabernacle that we call the human body. In the largest sense, the ultimate responsibility of the physician is to study and know those God-given defense mechanisms, those self-healing processes that are within us, and then carefully distinguish between those conditions in the body that *will* heal themselves from those afflictions that *will not* heal themselves with the passage of time. The latter are the conditions that require active intervention from medical science, while the former generally require support only.

To me, the essence of the study of medical sciences and the lesson I have learned, to which I testify, is that the human body is divinely created!

Reality of the Spirit

The second lesson is that of the reality of the spirit as a separate entity from the body. Perhaps the most obvious evidence of the distinction of the body from the spirit is that which we observe at the time of death, when the body minus the spirit seems so entirely different from the person we knew when the two

were together. To me, the more difficult challenge for us as students is to sense with equal validity the distinction between the body and the spirit as they are both *united* in the *living* human soul.

I remember one mother who knew the distinction, however, for she was the mother of a special child. This youngster was a mentally retarded individual, a mongoloid child. She said, "You know, I have a number of children. They are all very dear to me. I love them deeply. But there's something different about the spirit in this child with physical handicaps that is even more special than the spirit in any of my other children." This mother had learned to recognize clearly the sweet and special spirit in that problem-plagued body.

I remember another mother. Some years ago I was called to the home of a woman who was in an iron lung. She needed medical attention, and there was no way she could come to the doctor's office or to the hospital. She had spent every waking moment in this respirator for many years. She was dependent upon this iron lung for the breath of life that she could stay out of it for only a minute or so without assistance. During my visit in this home, I observed three children of this mother who conversed with her while she was in the iron lung. One came and said, "Mommy, may I have permission to go over to Mary's house and play for an hour?" The second child came over and said, "Mommy, will you help me with my arithmetic?" The third child was too small to look directly at her mother's face as it was exposed from this large tank. She caught her mother's eye only through a mirror overhead and said, "Mommy, may I have a cookie?" Tears came to my eyes because I realized that here was a body that was just as handicapped as a body can be, and yet the *reality of the spirit* of this mother in directing the lives and the spirits of her children was one of the most impressive things I have ever seen.

How helpful it would be if we would learn to distinguish clearly between the physical and spiritual components of the human soul. I've heard discouraged women say to their husbands, "How can you love me? There are many more beautiful women than I." Those women need to know that the love their husbands have for them is not corporeal love. It is a spiritual love. While it is true that the physical expression of that love is a beautiful and expressive part of that love, it is only incidental. The real love is the love of one spirit for another. I've seen this reaffirmed when I have taken a balding and rather pudgy, middle-aged man to the operating room away from a weeping, wonderful woman by his side who says to me, "Take good care of him—I love him."

The reality of the spirit as an eternal entity was taught forcefully to me as I read the journal of my grandfather A.C. Nelson, whom I did not meet in this life. He died when my father was in high school. But from my reading and from discussions with my dear father and mother, who are here with us today, I have learned to love and respect Grandfather. He served as superintendent of public instruction in this state and was a close friend and protégé of Karl G. Maeser. On April 6, 1891, about three months after the death of his father, he had what he recorded as a "strange dream or vision." His deceased father appeared to him. Grandfather asked his father what he was doing. His father smiled and said, "My son, I have been traveling together with Apostle Erastus Snow ever since I died—that is, since three days after I died, when I received the commission to preach the gospel. You cannot imagine, my son how many spirits there are in the spirit world that have not yet received the gospel, but many are receiving it, and a great work is being accomplished." Much more was said as recorded in Grandfather's journal. Then he concluded by saying, "Never do anything that will displease God. Oh, what a blessing

is the gospel! My son, be a good boy . . .
Goodbye.”

Only when one really senses the reality of the spirit can one realize the need for development of the spirit; it becomes as important as physical development. The *gifts* of the spirit—knowledge, wisdom, discernment, the gift of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, the gift of prophecy and faith—these great gifts of the spirit have nothing to do with the body, except that parts of the body may be used to acquire them. Now I know why one of the teachings of the Church is that whenever one receives a call through duly constituted priesthood authority one should accept that call, for this is a way that one may exercise the spirit and let it grow. Perfect the language of the spirit, which is prayer, and provide food for the spirit, such as music, the arts, knowledge, selfless service, and love. Those spiritual gifts which we attain will be with us, not only in this life, but in all eternity as well. I testify to the reality of the eternal spirit which resides in each of us!

The Power of Love

The third lesson is the power of love. There are many sources of power in the world. Recently we have been concerned with the shortages of some of those sources. But to me the greatest power of all is the power of love. I refer to love as proclaimed by the Savior in Matthew: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37) and “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39). The development of this power to love God and fellowmen is, to me, the greatest power that one may possess here upon the earth. The power of love is the power by which great leaders lead. The power of love is the power by which great teachers teach. The power of love is the power by which one may achieve true accomplishment. The power of love is the power by which a helpless woman

in an iron lung can lead her children in righteousness.

Occasionally one can appreciate the power of love only by its absence. Such were the thoughts of Lionel Bart through the lines of the poor homeless boy Oliver, who said,

*Every night I kneel and pray
Let tomorrow be the day
When I see the face of someone who
I can mean something to.
Where, where is love?*

Where the home is, there love should be. The home is the laboratory of love, and in it resides the most important unit of the Church and of society—the family. Recently I was interviewed by a representative of a national magazine who expressed keen interest in a photograph on my desk of Sister Nelson and me with our family. He asked if we had any problems with rebellious youth, drug abuse, and morals among such a large family. When I replied in the negative, his interest seemed to become more intense.

Then he said, “When did you and your wife start to plan for your family and give them such emphasis in your lives?”

I simply replied, “*Before* we were ever married.” Then I continued, “You see, we believe that our major goal in life is to strengthen our family. Service in the Church, the community, continuing education, and our occupational endeavors all are undertaken to provide development for our family.”

He seemed surprised. He countered, “But earlier in our interview you said you and your wife had always tried to obey the scripture, ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God’ [Matthew 6:33]. Now you tell me the family comes first.”

He thought he had me. But I simply reviewed by long-established priorities and said, “I cannot seek the kingdom of God without loving and honoring *first* that family he has given to me. I cannot honor that family

without loving and caring *first* for my wife!" I love her. She is my highest priority, and our eternal marriage in the temple is our highest commitment. We love our children and their children born and yet unborn. This love we are building in the sanctuary of our home. Here is where we have learned the power of love, and I testify that it is a real, dynamic, all-encompassing power!

The Dependability and Incontrovertibility of Divine Law

The fourth lesson I would like to share with you today is that of the dependability, yes, even the incontrovertibility, of divine law. You have read and no doubt quoted that statement in the 130th section of the Doctrine and Covenants which says, "When we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated" (D&C 130:21). This is a very simple statement, as profound as it is true.

When I started medical school, we were taught that one must not touch the heart, for if one did, it would stop beating. Yet the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants tells us that "all kingdoms have a law given" (D&C 88:36). Therefore I knew that even the blessing of the heartbeat was predicated upon law and reasoned that, if those laws could be understood and controlled, then perhaps they could be utilized for the blessing of the sick. To me this meant that, if we would work, study, and ask the proper questions in our scientific experiments, we could learn the laws which govern the blessing of the heartbeat. Now, some thirty years later, having learned some of those laws, we know that we can turn the heartbeat on and off at will to perform delicate repairs on damaged valves or vessels and then let the heart beat again—provided we obey the laws upon which that blessing has been predicated.

Divine law is incontrovertible! I see people who wish, who hope, who pray for health. But as a surgeon I can tell you that all of the

wishes, the hopes, and the prayers of people can be overridden by lack of compliance to law. If a law cannot be obeyed, those blessings cannot come. Sometimes I am concerned as I hear people in the Church pray for "favors and blessings." Blessings cannot come by chance. If we pray for *unearned* favors, we will not get the blessings, nor will we deserve them. Please don't construe my remarks as an indication that wishes, prayers, and faith are not important. They too are part of the process of law, for they help healing also. All I am saying is that if one breaks the law one has to reap the consequences. This does not mean that repentance is not available if a law has been broken. Repentance is part of divine law also. But obedience to law gives freedom, mastery, and dependability.

The Lord said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). It is only as we strive for and achieve perfection that we can master the law and control the consequences. Knowing and living the truth bring us freedom from the bondage that disobedience to law brings. So, to each of you in whatever field or "kingdom" you may choose, learn the law. Once you know the law, apply it and then be consistent. Don't be inconsistent. There are those who pray for safety during the day and then drive recklessly and lawlessly. There are those who pray for health and then disregard the laws governing good health. There are those who profess reverence for life and at the same time argue for abortion or euthanasia. Consistency comes from self-discipline in recognizing and revering divine law.

Divine law tells us to prepare for that which is yet to come. Today the world is ripening in iniquity, which will destroy civilization as we now know it. The scriptures attest that "the anger of the Lord is kindled, and his sword is bathed in heaven, and it shall fall upon the inhabitants of the earth. . . . and the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice

of the Lord, . . . of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people” (D&C 1:13–14). “The devil shall have power over his own dominion. And also the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst” (D&C 1:35–36).

Our duty is to raise up a generation of men and women worthy to receive the coming of the Lord. For he will come—to Jackson County, Missouri, to be sustained as King of Kings—and he will come also to Israel to be hailed as Lord of Lords. Then his millennial reign will be ushered in.

You young, strong, and faithful men and women will bear the burden of the kingdom of God upon the earth as these days of destiny come. May God bless you as you prepare for them that you may know the divine creation of the human body you possess, the reality of the spirit, the power of love, and the dependability and incontrovertibility of divine law.

I know that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that this is his Church, directed by him through a living prophet, President Spencer W. Kimball, whom I sustain with all of my heart. This I testify in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.