

## *Fledgling Finches and Family Life*

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Since I received this assignment from the First Presidency, I have read carefully the theme and pondered and prayed. I have reviewed the catalog listing more than 1,000 classes and the names of the instructors. There is a good feeling to all of it. I have come this morning to teach.

When we presided over the New England Mission, we lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Across the street lived Dr. Carl J. Friedrich, a retired Harvard professor, a world renowned scholar. We sent our boys over to clear their sidewalk of snow. That opened contact with them. When my wife's parents came to visit at Christmas, the Friedrichs invited us over for the lighting of their Christmas tree, an old-fashioned tree with wax candles alit. It was a very beautiful experience.

While visiting one day with Dr. Friedrich, he told me of his academic degrees from European universities. He became very agitated and said it really irritated him when people asked what he was going to do with all the knowledge he had gained. He answered sharply, "Why should I have to do anything with it?"

Well, I know that you have something to do with the knowledge that you will gain in this

great Education Week for yourself, for your family, and for the Church. You are learning much at this great conference.

I do not know who wrote these very meaningful lines, but I think they apply today:

*Suppose that we state as a tenet of wisdom  
That knowledge is not for delight of the mind,  
Nor an end in itself, but a packet of treasure  
To hold and employ for the good of mankind.*

*A torch or a candle is barren of meaning  
Except it give light to men as they climb,  
And theses and tomes are but impotent jumble  
Unless they are tools in the building of time.*

...

*And truly our tireless and endless researches  
Need yoking with man's daily problems and strife,  
For truth and beauty and virtue have value  
Confirmed by their uses in practical life.<sup>1</sup>*

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*Boyd K. Packer was President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was delivered on 18 August 2009 during Campus Education Week.*

I feel the best possible use of what you are learning at this BYU Education Week will be for your family.

### **The House Finches and the Serpents**

The back windows of our home overlook a small flower garden and the woods which border Little Cottonwood Creek. The north side of the garden is the gable end of another part of the house. Except for a large window in the middle, this wall is thickly covered with English ivy.

Every year this ivy has been the nesting place for house finches. They are small birds dressed as drably as sparrows except in the springtime, when the male puts on a bright red cap and neckerchief as his costume for the serenading that he will do during the nesting season. The male house finch is one of the best soloists in the bird world. The nests in the vines are safe from the foxes and raccoons and cats that are about at night.

One day there was a great commotion in the ivy. Desperate cries of distress brought eight or 10 finches from the surrounding woods to join in this cry of alarm. I soon saw the source of the commotion. A snake slid partway down out of the ivy and hung in front of the window just long enough for me to jerk it out of the ivy and slam it against the ground. The middle part of the snake's body had two bulges—clear evidence convicting the snake of having taken two fledglings from the nest.

Not in the 50 years that we have lived in our home had we seen anything like that before. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience—or so we thought.

A few days later there was another commotion, this time in the vines covering our dog run—we heard the same cries of panic and saw the same gathering of the neighborhood finches. Now we knew what the predator was. A grandson climbed onto the run and pulled out another snake that was still holding on

tightly to the mother bird it had caught on the nest and killed.

I said to myself, "What is going on? Is Eden being invaded again?"

We do not destroy the snakes every time we see them, for they help to control insects and rodents. But we had learned a lesson this time.

For years I had thought the vines were perfectly safe for the birds, but the lesson was much too obvious—too clearly obvious. I reflected upon Adam and Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden as recorded in the book of Genesis.<sup>2</sup>

Now if this story of birds and serpents is an unpleasant way to begin a sermon and makes us uncomfortable, it was meant to do just that. I have read the plainspoken words of the prophets. Some of their teachings are not always comfortable to read. But while this example is unpleasant to talk about, I hope that the principle will be more plainly understood.

### **The Adversary's Influence**

There came into my mind the warnings spoken by the prophets. We will not always be safe from the adversary's influence, even within our own homes. We need to protect our nestlings.

In order to do that, we must first acknowledge that Satan, the devil, lives; what his purposes are; what his intentions would be; and what our defenses should be.

He was lying in wait in the Sacred Grove when the boy Joseph entered. No doubt Satan was hoping to forestall the Restoration. He was an "actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as [the boy Joseph] had never before felt in any being" (JS—H 1:16).

### **A Dangerous World**

We know that we are spirit children of heavenly parents here on earth to receive our mortal bodies and to be tested. We live in a very dangerous world that threatens those

things which are spiritual. The family, the most fundamental organization of the Church, is under attack from forces seen and unseen. The adversary is about. His objective is to cause injury to the family. If he can weaken and destroy the family, he will have succeeded.

The scriptures tell us, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

We also know that the prophets have said that Satan cannot take one sparrow, or one finch, out of our nest unless we permit it.<sup>3</sup>

### Perilous Times Have Come

Paul warned Timothy and warns us. (Notice how perfectly this warning describes what is going on around us now.)

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.*

*For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents [let me repeat that—“disobedient to parents,”], unthankful, unholy,*

*Without natural affection [let me repeat that—“without natural affection”], trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,*

*Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;*

*Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

*For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,*

*Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. [2 Timothy 3:1–7]*

These verses serve as a warning, showing us the patterns to avoid. We must be ever watchful and diligent.

But Paul also gave us the key to our protection. Speaking in the same chapter, he identi-

fied healing power in this small phrase: “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

In 2 Nephi we are warned:

*Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!  
Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well!*

*Yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost!*

*Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more! [2 Nephi 28:24–27]*

Moroni spoke of the wickedness of the secret combinations and the wicked men to come among us. He warned us that they would be with us in our day and said:

*When ye shall see these things come among you that ye [should] awake to a sense of your awful situation. . . .*

*Wherefore, I, Moroni, am commanded to write these things that evil may be done away, and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but that they may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved. [Ether 8:24, 26]*

### A Pattern in All Things

Do we need any more evidence to understand that we are at war with the adversary? The revelations teach us how to win this spiritual war:

*And again, I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations—*

*Wherefore he that prayeth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me if he obey mine ordinances. [D&C 52:14–15]*

### **The Seventy**

The Lord called 70 men and sent them forth. He gave them authority to teach and instruct and combat the forces of evil. These Seventies returned, and the New Testament says they marveled “with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name” (Luke 10:17).

And the Lord replied, “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19).

We have the names of these Seventies who were called at the time of Christ. Stephen, the martyr, was one of the Seventy, and Nicanor, who also died when Stephen was martyred, was a Seventy.<sup>4</sup>

Much has been done to prepare the Church and its members to resist the forces of evil. We live in a day of revealed direction. I have been witness as a General Authority to changes that were revealed from time to time in order that the Lord might better edify His children.

For example, when I first came into these circles of the Church there were seven Presidents of the Seventy. They were the First Council of Seventy, the seven of them, and other seventies were in stakes. That pattern of organization served its purpose for a time. As the Church began to grow and move abroad, more Quorums of Seventy were required to minister to branches and wards and stakes and missions across the globe. And much has been changed over the years. The seventies in the stake quorums have been discontinued. Instead, there are now eight Quorums of Seventy with 85 General Authority Seventies and 218 Area Seventies assigned to the work. Each of the Seventy has had conferred upon him the apostolic authority.

The role of the Seventy is to instruct and edify the leaders and members of the Church and to build up and strengthen fathers and mothers in their sacred role as parents and leaders in the home. They strengthen the par-

ents, including single mothers who need and deserve the watch-care that they can receive.

The Seventy go where the Twelve, limited by their number, cannot. Seventies are scattered across the world, as they were in the early days of the Church. When you look at the map of the world and where they are, it is dotted with the Seventies who are now serving.

One who holds the office of Apostle, Seventy, patriarch, high priest, or elder carries the consummate priesthood authority held on the earth—the Melchizedek Priesthood or “the priesthood . . . after the holiest order of God” (D&C 84:18).

### **God Is Our Father**

From the accounts of the Council in Heaven we learn that God is our Father, and we are His children.<sup>5</sup> We would do well to always remember Him as our Father. We are instructed to address Him as “our Father which art in heaven” (Matthew 6:9).

Our Father delegates to His priesthood leaders a commanding authority to preach, to teach, to minister, and to bless.

### **Those with a Body Have Power over Those Without**

Joseph Smith taught that “wicked spirits have their bounds.” Now listen carefully:

*Wicked spirits have their bounds, limits, and laws by which they are governed or controlled. . . . It is very evident that they possess a power that none but those who have the Priesthood can control.*<sup>6</sup>

Joseph Smith also taught a principle crucial in importance that everyone, particularly those holding the priesthood, should fully understand. He said:

*We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is*

*his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man. . . .*

*All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not [let me say that again—"all beings who have bodies have power over those who have not"]. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him.<sup>7</sup>*

*Satan cannot seduce us by his enticements unless we in our hearts consent and yield. Our organization is such that we can resist the devil; if we were not organized so, we would not be free agents.<sup>8</sup>*

### **Moral Agency**

The agency defined in the scriptures is a "moral agency," which means that we can choose between good and evil.

*That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment. [D&C 101:78]*

We feel free to choose our actions and our responses to life's events and challenges, but we are not free to choose the consequences of those actions.

### **Tolerance Can Become a Vice**

I must say something about tolerance. Tolerance is a virtue, but, like all virtues, when exaggerated it transforms itself into a vice. The permissiveness afforded by the weakening of the laws of the land to tolerate acts of immorality does not reduce the serious spiritual consequences that result from the violation of God's law of chastity.

Let me say that again: We who have bodies have the power and authority over those who do not. And we are free to choose what we will and to pick and choose our acts, but we are not free to choose the consequences. They come as they will come.

Alma taught that "the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance" (Alma 45:16). In order to understand, we must separate the sin from the sinner.

While "the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance," He is not condemning everyone because of sin. For example, when they brought Him a woman taken in adultery, obviously guilty, He dismissed the case with five words, "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). That is the spirit and the letter of His ministry.

### **All Have the Light of Christ**

We are born with the Light of Christ, a guiding influence which permits each person to recognize right from wrong.

*For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.*

*But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him. [Moroni 7:16–17]*

Teach yourself and teach your families about the gift of the Holy Ghost.

*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*

*If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. [1 Corinthians 3:16–17]*

### **Moses and Satan**

The Pearl of Great Price begins with an account of Moses being shown all of the

creations of God. When this great vision came to him, Moses learned by this enlightening experience the great difference between being in the presence of the Father and the presence of the imitator—the adversary. There is instruction for us in this account from the Pearl of Great Price.

After being instructed by the Lord and having seen all things,

*the presence of God withdrew from Moses, . . . and [he] was left unto himself. . . .*

*And it came to pass that it was for the space of many hours before Moses did again receive his natural strength like unto man; and he said unto himself: Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed [meaning he was completely humble, completely reduced]. [Moses 1:9–10]*

And in that circumstance, during that time, “it came to pass that . . . Satan came tempting him, saying: Moses, son of man, worship me” (Moses 1:12).

Moses refused, noting the difference in glory between the Father, whom he had just seen, and Lucifer, the fallen son of the morning. Moses said:

*Who art thou? For behold, I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten; and where is thy glory, that I should worship thee?*

*For behold, I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me, and I were transfigured before him. But I can look upon thee in the natural man. Is it not so, surely? [Moses 1:13–14]*

In consummate arrogance, Satan angrily demanded, “I am the Only Begotten, worship me” (Moses 1:19).

Moses was frightened, but when “he received strength, . . . he commanded, saying: Depart from me, Satan, for this one God only will I worship, which is the God of glory” (Moses 1:20).

Satan did not leave. Two times more Moses ordered him to leave him. Both times he remained.

The fourth time, Moses invoked the ultimate authority and commanded Satan to depart, saying:

*In the name of the Only Begotten, depart hence, Satan.*

*And it came to pass that Satan cried with a loud voice, with weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth; and he departed hence. [Moses 1:21–22]*

Moses learned something about himself, about the Lord, and about the limited power of the adversary through that experience.

Each one of us has to work through a similar testing.

The scriptures tell us, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Corinthians 2:12).

### **Focus on the Family**

For several decades I have watched the changes in the Church to restructure and clarify the focus on the family.

Family home evening was encouraged by the First Presidency in 1915. The first family home evening manual was printed in 1965. Then in 1970 all auxiliaries and agencies of the Church were instructed to set Monday evening aside for family home evening.

Family home evening accommodates a man who holds the priesthood, the father of the home, to preside over and instruct his children, with his wife, the children’s mother, as his helpmeet at his side fortifying the home with their combined testimonies. And the single mothers are given that authority. The single mother is never far from His watch-care. Family home evening is not just an ordinary, routine program of the Church.

In 1995 that great document “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”<sup>9</sup> was prepared by all members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. It speaks of gender set before birth to be protected and never defiled.

The hope is that Latter-day Saints will recognize the transcendent importance of the family and live in such a spiritually attentive way that the adversary cannot steal into the home and carry away the children like that serpent did to those innocent nestling finches.

### **The Priesthood Protects Our Homes**

Our homes are most vulnerable; therefore, the consummate power of the priesthood has been given to protect the home and its inhabitants. It is not an easy or small thing to be a presiding officer in the Church or in the home. The father has the authority and responsibility to teach his children and to bless and provide for them the ordinances of the gospel and every other priesthood protection necessary. He is to demonstrate love and fidelity and honor to the mother before the children that they can see that love.

“The great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8) provides that an ordinary member can be extraordinary just “by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (Articles of Faith 1:3). We can find safety and security for ourselves and our children by honoring the covenants we have made and living up to the ordinary acts of obedience required of the followers of Christ.

Other simple, individual acts of obedience include prayer, scripture study, temple worship, payment of tithes and offerings, and acceptance and faithful fulfillment of callings.

Isaiah said, “The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (Isaiah 32:17).

That peace is also promised in the revelations in which the Lord declares, “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear” (D&C 38:30).

### **Fear Is the Opposite of Faith**

Some of you have come today with heavy hearts regarding the welfare of a wayward family member—a son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter. Some of you have been denied the privilege of worthy companionship or even an opportunity of marriage. Some have been denied the privilege of parenthood. But it is not finished in mortality.

Let me remind you that fear is the opposite of faith. Be hopeful, faithful, and prayerful. Lucifer will *not* succeed. I do not believe that any righteous, pleading prayers will go unheeded.

The Lord has said:

*While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. [John 17:12]*

I have come to know that faith is a real power, not just an expression or belief. We have a body (Satan does not); we have faith (Satan does not). However much we suffer along the way, in the end all can be well.

Parents should know that ultimately their children need not be lost. Prayers and service will be rewarded with the thing that they desire the most: the safety and welfare of their children.

### **Light and Truth**

The revelations teach:

*The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.*

*Light and truth forsake that evil one. [D&C 93:36–37]*

We are commanded “to bring up [our] children in light and truth” (D&C 93:40). If we explore and understand the things of the Spirit, then we can find out who the enemy is and how to protect ourselves and our children.

I pray that each of us here can come to know who we are: a child of God embodied in a physical body with attendant powers and blessings. The gospel has been restored and the consummate power of priesthood is among us. If you are righteous and faithful, He will answer your prayers, though not always in mortal life. We believe in an eternal pattern of progression under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we worship, and in reverence to the Father, who is our Father, the Father in Heaven.

I invoke His blessings upon all of us here that the knowledge of the gospel doctrines will protect us and arm us against any challenge that may come to us in our life and do so as a servant of the Lord and in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Anonymous, in “Science for Service,” *Improving College and University Teaching* 5, no. 2 (spring 1957): 54.
2. See Genesis 2–3.
3. See Matthew 10:29–31.
4. See John M’Clintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* [New York: Harper and Brothers., 1880], 9:600.
5. See D&C 138:56; see also Acts 17:29, Romans 8:16, Hebrews 12:9.
6. *Teachings*, 208.
7. *Teachings*, 181.
8. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 213; quoted by William P. McIntire, reporting a discourse given by Joseph Smith in early 1841 in Nauvoo, Illinois; William Patterson McIntire, Notebook 1840–45, Church Archives.
9. *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.