

# *A Good Name — A Priceless Possession*

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**I**t is a privilege to stand before you this morning as we begin a new school year. My husband and I are now in our second year at Brigham Young University, and our lives have been enriched in so many different ways during our time here. We look forward to the days and months ahead in your midst.

In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet speaks to herself and says, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet" (act 2, scene 2, lines 43–44). By definition your name is a word by which you are known. As I was growing up, I often wished that I could have another surname than the one I had. I still wanted to be me and I still wanted the same family I had, but I really would rather have been known by a last name that others could pronounce and spell correctly.

Mine was a French name that had its origin in the eastern Mediterranean area. From there my ancestors immigrated to the Neuchâtel area of Switzerland. Upon hearing or seeing my surname for the first time, no one knew how to say it. Those few who did attempt to pronounce it most often were very wrong, and thus embarrassed—to say nothing of how I felt. It was spelled G-i-a-u-q-u-e, and we pronounced it "juke."

When I was young and would list the attributes that I wanted in a future husband, tacked on to the usual ones would be that he must have a last name that would be easy to spell and pronounce. I felt that I would be very happy when I could be known by another more familiar surname than the one I had received at birth. To me, *Samuelson* was a good choice in this regard.

In August 1995 my husband, two daughters, and I moved to Solihull, England, where my husband was to begin fulfilling a Church assignment that lasted three years. At that time my parents gave me a family history book they had compiled that included many stories of my ancestors. I started reading these stories and was very touched by them. I am sure visiting the areas where most of my ancestors had lived personalized the love I began to feel for them. I also gained a deep appreciation for the sacrifices they had made because of their testimonies of the gospel—especially leaving that beautiful green land to come to the dry Salt Lake Valley.

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*Sharon G. Samuelson, wife of BYU president Cecil O. Samuelson, delivered this devotional address on 14 September 2004.*

However, my Giauque ancestors had come from Switzerland, and my desire to visit this area grew very strong—particularly after I began to know them better after reading their histories and especially the story of my great-great-grandmother. May I just tell you a portion of what was written about her life in my family history book?

*In the year 1860 the father died of typhoid fever, leaving the support of the four children to the mother. One day the LDS missionaries came, and Mother Giauque readily accepted the gospel and was baptized on 6 May 1864. After that her greatest desire was to go to Zion [or the center of the Church]. Every spare penny was saved from her earnings with this in view.*

*In June 1868, arrangements had been made to organize a company of Saints in Liverpool to go to Zion. This opportunity should not be allowed to pass! This placed mother in a position where she made the hardest decision of her life. There was enough money for one passage, so she decided to send her 11-year-old son to Zion to prepare the way for her and her youngest son. She said that when the leaving came, she could scarcely bear the suffering of parting with her boy. She was fortified with the knowledge that he was a serious, responsible boy and would be in the care of other Saints. When she had said good-bye to him and the missionary of that town, she stood in her doorway and watched them crossing the fields as they started on their journey. Several times the boy stopped and waved to her, and it was with the greatest restraint that she kept herself from calling to him to return. But she remained strong and watched until they passed from view.*

This young boy did make it to the Salt Lake Valley with the help and love of other Saints and their families. After three years his mother and he had saved enough money for Mother Giauque and her other son to join him in Salt Lake. This second son was my great-grandfather, and because of the faith and testimony of my great-great-grandmother

and other ancestors, I began to appreciate the fact that I bore their name. I should never have been embarrassed by the fact that it was different. In fact, I now feel an obligation to honor those who went before me and whose lives and names I represent.

Before we moved back to Salt Lake City in 1998, my husband, daughter Sara, and I did have the opportunity to visit the small village of Saint-Imier. We felt a thankfulness that the missionaries had found my great-great-grandmother in this small village nestled among the hills of Switzerland.

Each of you here today has your own history, ancestral line, and name. Each of your stories is different. In many areas of our lives, we are a compilation of what our ancestors were. Characteristics, traits, abilities, and virtues of ancestors can be observed in us, their descendants who bear their names. The lives led by our ancestors have determined in many different aspects how our lives are unfolding today. We are influenced by the actions and characteristics of our forebears. Blessings we receive in our lives today may be a direct result of the sacrifices and faith of those who lived before us.

Knowledge of our ancestors and appreciation for their names that we bear can give direction to our lives. In our ancestral lines may be individuals whose actions we would not or should not emulate. We do, however, have the agency to conduct our lives at present so that they will reflect righteousness for our posterity. The questions can be asked: What are we doing to ensure that the righteous legacies we have received will be passed on to our descendants? What are we doing with our names?

In Proverbs we read, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches” (Proverbs 22:1), and in Ecclesiastes it says, “A good name is better than precious ointment” (Ecclesiastes 7:1). In relating the details of the First Vision, Joseph Smith stated that one of the personages

who stood above him “spake unto me, calling me by name” (JS—H 1:17). He was also called by his name when he was visited by the angel Moroni (see JS—H 1:33).

Each of our names represents who we are. We become known by our name to all with whom we associate. Our reputation or the opinion generally held of us is always inextricably linked to our name. Yes, our name and reputation are inseparable.

I know of one young man who was working for an accounting firm and assigned to do some work at a local business. Because this young man had the same last name as someone with whom the business had previously had a negative and unsatisfactory relationship, the firm would not let the young man stay and complete the project. The two men were not even acquainted, nor had they ever even met. They just had the same surname. This is an example of the power of a person’s name and reputation. In this instance it was a very negative one.

A few months ago I received a call from a gentleman who had been a student of my father-in-law in the educational psychology department of a university more than 30 years ago. I was asked by him about Dr. Samuelson and what had happened in the intervening years. He told me how much he had respected my father-in-law as a professor and admired him as a man. Dr. Samuelson, he stated, always was an example of his beliefs in the Church and its teachings. Dr. Samuelson’s name was known for his spiritual as well as professional and personal attributes. In this instance it was a very positive opinion.

Our good name and reputation are priceless. Shakespeare also said: “He that filches [or steals] from me my good name / Robs me of that which not enriches him / And makes me poor indeed” (*Othello*, act 3, scene 3, lines 163–65). One builds his reputation each and every day by his thoughts, actions, choices, and associations. We are all representatives of our

own families, and the reputation of a family is established through the actions of each member of that family. Also, we are representatives of our community, church, nation, and, for all of us here, Brigham Young University. As we conduct our lives now, even the smallest actions reflect upon them and their names.

Most of us are familiar with the story of a time when President George Albert Smith was seriously ill and had a dream in which he saw his grandfather after whom he had been named. In his account President Smith stated:

*He [meaning his grandfather] looked at me earnestly and said:*

*“I would like to know what you have done with my name.”*

*Everything I had ever done passed before me as though it were a flying picture on a screen. . . . I smiled and looked at my grandfather and said:*

*“I have never done anything with your name of which you need be ashamed.” [George Albert Smith, *Sharing the Gospel with Others*, comp. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 112; see also “Your Good Name,” *Improvement Era*, March 1947, 139]*

To have an unspotted name and reputation is of greater value than all the wealth one could acquire in a lifetime.

Our Savior Jesus Christ knows each one of us by name. He wants us to return to live with Him once again. He wants us to live eternally with our families. We therefore have a great responsibility to our ancestors as well as to our descendants to live in a way that will enable us to achieve this eternal goal. President Gordon B. Hinckley once stated to a group of college students:

*To you I say with all of the energy of which I am capable, do not become a weak link in the chain of your generations. You come to the world with a marvelous inheritance. You come of great men and women. . . . Never let them down. Never do anything*

*which would weaken the chain of which you are a fundamental part* (Scroll, 14 Sept. 1999, 20). [From Ricks College devotional, 7 September 1999; student newspaper article quoted by Stephen B. Oveson in “Our Legacy,” *Ensign*, November 1999, 30; see also BYU devotional, 30 November 1999, “Keep the Chain Unbroken,” *Brigham Young University 1999–2000 Speeches* (Provo: BYU, 2000), 109, 111]

In the Book of Mormon, Helaman tells his sons, Nephi and Lehi, “I have given unto you the names of our first parents [so] that when you remember your names ye may remember them; . . . that they were good” (Helaman 5:6). He hoped that his sons would also “do that which is good,” so that their descendants would remember them in the same manner (verse 7).

The scriptures teach us that our names are written in heaven. Our names in this “book of life” (Alma 5:58) will be known by our thoughts and actions during our sojourn upon the earth. We are also taught in the

scriptures that a heavenly record is kept of the faithful—whose names are recorded, as well as an account of their righteous deeds (see D&C 88:2; 128:7).

There is another name by which we should all be known besides the one we received from our earthly fathers. That is the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Mosiah we are told by King Benjamin, “I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ” (Mosiah 5:8). King Benjamin then continued:

*Ye should remember to retain the name written always in your hearts, that ye are not found on the left hand of God, but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call you.* [Mosiah 5:12]

My dear brothers and sisters, may we honor our names and thus our forebears as we strive to live righteous lives so that it can be said and written of us and the names we bear “that they were good.” This is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.