

## *A Place Within His Heart*

SHARON G. SAMUELSON

It is a pleasure to welcome all of you back to Brigham Young University in 2006. It is a new year and a time for many resolutions to improve and change, but hopefully most of these are made throughout the year when needed and appropriate. For all of you 2006 is a year for realizing countless opportunities, setting goals, and anticipating accomplishments. It will present many choices and decisions for you. They are yours to grasp, make, and lead you forward—if you always remember to seek and do the Lord’s will amidst the challenges and excitement of life each and every day. It is both my husband’s and my wish that this year of your time here at the university will be a wonderful and successful one.

It was a little over a year ago when the devastating tsunami occurred in parts of Asia. We were all shocked and saddened by this news. Our hearts were deeply touched as we witnessed the devastation and loss of life as well the examples of compassion and goodness of people throughout the world seeking to help those who were suffering. A few days following the tragedy, I was watching a television program that was describing and discussing the tsunami and its aftermath. I can’t recall the names or titles of the participants on the program; however, I vividly recall—and have never forgotten—a response to a question by

the commentator given by a woman associated with and knowledgeable about the efforts being done to help the victims as well as to account for those who had lost their lives.

The interviewer put forth this question: “Can you give an estimate of how many lives have probably been lost as a result of this natural disaster?”

Her response was, “In many parts of the area where much damage was done, people are not counted in life; therefore, it is impossible to count them in death.”

My first thought after a short and shocked hesitation—caused by the bluntness of her answer—was: “You are wrong. You neither are knowledgeable about nor understand the Lord’s magnificent plan of salvation. If only you really knew that our Heavenly Father counts each one of these men, women, and children as His son or daughter.”

We are instructed in the Doctrine and Covenants and reassured many, many times throughout the scriptures to “remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (D&C 18:10). These souls include those who

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*Sharon G. Samuelson, wife of BYU president Cecil O. Samuelson, delivered this devotional address on 10 January 2006.*

may never have had the opportunity in mortality to hear the message of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and the principles of the gospel it teaches. As I listened to that program, I was so thankful for my testimony of these principles and the knowledge that all who have lived, are living, and will yet live in this earthly realm are sons and daughters of a loving Father in Heaven.

There have been times in my life when I have been in the midst of hundreds or thousands of people: for example, at a football game in LaVell Edwards Stadium, with 65,000 people screaming and cheering; a crowded metropolis at Christmastime with people scurrying in and out of stores shopping for gifts; or a busy airport with people hurrying to catch planes headed in a multitude of directions. You have had these experiences too. Maybe you too have felt as I have at times and also pondered the thought “I am but one person among all these hundreds and thousands of people.” Then the mind tries to comprehend the millions and billions who have gone before, who are here now, and who will people the earth in the future. Have you at times asked yourselves, as I have, “Am I really that important? Just how much is my worth as I lead my life?”

This soul-searching question is answered in John 3:16, where we are taught that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” so we could have eternal life. We know that we are spirit children of an exalted, glorified being who is our Father in Heaven. The Lord counts us all in life as well as in death—as He does the victims of the tsunami—and because we know who we are, we know why we are here: to strive to return one day to dwell in His presence. And this is what He desires for us too.

The Lord loves each one of us. We are His own. Moses was told by the Lord that He created our world and its inhabitants and that all are His (see Moses 1:35). How blessed we are to have such knowledge. Listen to the words of

a beautiful woman who gained this awareness as she struggled with her own self-worth and understanding of who she was:

*As a convert, the hymn “God Loved Us, So He Sent His Son” was sung at the very first sacrament meeting I attended as a brand-new member of the Church. For the first 18 years of my life I struggled with my worth and with who I was and what my importance was to anyone. I had been told I was the ugliest girl in my school, and I carried that label with me for many years. As I took the missionary discussions, I learned enough of the gospel plan to know it was true and right. At my first sacrament meeting when the third verse of that hymn was sung, I knew in that moment for the first time who I really was and what my importance was. That moment changed everything for me. Nothing on the outside changed, but everything on the inside did. I was part of His plan, His offering. And I hold a place within His Heart. [Personal communication]*

The world in which we live today tells us that our sense of worth is based upon what is seen or accomplished. We are measured by possessions and wealth, physical appearance and dress styles, social status and achievements. Too many of us strive to gain acceptance using these standards, trying to enhance the perception of our worth by those who are part of our lives as well as those who view us from afar. If we are not careful, we can let others determine and establish our standards and feelings of self-worth. We can become someone else’s image of success rather than our own.

President Harold B. Lee often quoted Harry Emerson Fosdick’s description of a prayer of an old Edinburgh weaver: “O God, help me to hold a high opinion of myself” (Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Twelve Tests of Character* [New York: Association Press, 1941], 35; see Harold B. Lee, “Understanding Who We Are Brings Self-Respect,” *Ensign*, January 1974, 4). In other words, the weaver prayed that he would value

himself for what he was rather than for the opinions held by others. William Shakespeare also said:

*This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*  
[*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, lines 78–80]

As university students you are dealing with the worldly requirements for success every day. Therefore, if you do not constantly remind yourselves of what is of true value and worth, you can lose perspective and insight as you forge ahead into the future. Sister Patricia Holland, speaking in a Brigham Young University devotional, stated:

*We are becoming so concerned about having perfect figures, or straight A's, or professional status . . . that we are being torn from our true selves. We often worry so much about pleasing and performing for others that we lose our own uniqueness, that full and relaxed acceptance of ourselves as a person of worth and individuality.* [Patricia T. Holland, "The Soul's Center" (13 January 1987), *BYU 1986–87 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo: BYU, 1987), 84]

My dear friends, I worry that we often forget that each one of us is inherently of great worth because we are children of God. It is easy to forget if we listen to the voices of the world's values that surround us. Elder Neal A. Maxwell put it best: "Some among us mistakenly see the size and response of their audiences as the sole verification of their worth" (Neal A. Maxwell, "Irony: The Crust on the Bread of Adversity," *Ensign*, May 1989, 63).

Often these audiences would lead us to have a false sense of worth. This is evident today in the media messages as well as in the examples of many around us who live in and seek notoriety. The values of virtue, chastity, modesty, integrity, faith, love, and respect, among many

others, are not perceived as worthwhile by so many today. The world would judge us to be of more worth by what we have than by what is in our hearts. It would have us reject these God-given values in favor of others that could lead us away from righteousness and positive feelings of self-worth.

The Lord has warned us in the scriptures that we are seeking the things of the world rather than seeking Him when we place the greatest value on riches and the praises of men. We are told that many are not chosen by the Lord "because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and [they] aspire to the honors of men" (D&C 121:35).

It is invaluable to each one of us that we always know and never forget that the measure of our worth is in our divine heritage. The gospel teaches us that our true worth is based upon its teachings and principles. We do not need the world to tell us whether we are successful and worthwhile or not.

The Lord does desire for us to be successful in our righteous endeavors—whether temporal or spiritual. There are many things of the world that are pleasing in His sight—such as gaining knowledge and wisdom as you study here—but one must never forget that the source of all these things is the Lord, and thus we should show Him gratitude. Showing gratitude to the Lord helps us better see our worth in His sight.

We strengthen our sense of worth by being dignified in the lives we lead and by following the teachings of our Lord, Jesus Christ. As we rely upon our Savior for guidance and His deep love for us in all we do, our feelings of personal worth will be expressed in the lives we lead, and we then bless others by our example and service.

Our eternal worth is given to us by God. We do not have to let it be determined by others—only by God and ourselves. We can lose sight of our self-worth if we do not keep the commandments and consequently disregard the divinity within us. The focus of the work of

our Savior, Jesus Christ, is each one of us, as expressed in the book of Moses: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

In conclusion, let me recite to you from the third verse of “God Loved Us, So He Sent His Son” that reminded my friend of her true self-worth—as it should remind all of us:

*Oh, love effulgent, love divine!  
What debt of gratitude is mine,  
That in his off’ring I have part  
And hold a place within his heart.*  
[*Hymns*, 1985, no. 187]

It is my prayer that each of us may know of our worth to those who truly love us, especially our Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.