

Let the Light Shine

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It is indeed my pleasure to welcome you, my dear friends, back to a new semester at Brigham Young University in a new year—2009. I tend to view a new year as somewhat of a fresh start in my life. It offers me the opportunity to reflect on the previous year and to evaluate my life and the growth I hopefully have made as I strive to become the person I want to be in relation to the teachings of our Savior, Jesus Christ. I would surmise that most of you have done the same as you attempt to set New Year's goals.

As I went through this process and reflected upon the birth of Christ this past Christmas season, I felt deeply that the world today has an even greater need to make room in our hearts for Him. This past year we have seen that conditions of the world economically, politically, and socially can be extremely dark and depressing without the hope and knowledge of the Savior's mission and message.

A short time ago a friend related to a group of women an experience she had in 1980. While she was attending Sunday School at a church meeting in eastern Washington, the class was informed that there were unusual cloud formations in the sky. The class went outside to view them and saw that the formations were indeed very strange and unique. The entire sky consisted of huge, puffy gray clouds for as far

as they could see. They were told it was possible that a volcano had erupted on the coast. Then they heard over a car radio that Mount Saint Helens had erupted and that, even though the volcano was hundreds of miles away from them, the wind was blowing the clouds of ash toward the east. At that point no one was too concerned.

However, later in the afternoon the sky began to get darker and darker. Before long it was completely black with an eerie darkness that she had never seen before or since. The members were counseled to be careful as they drove home.

As my friend continued telling her experience to our group, she said:

There was a sense of concern and fear of the unknown. When we went to the cars, there was powdery stuff everywhere. It was falling all around us. It was coming down like a dry rain and contributed to the darkness. There were now clouds of ash surrounding us. It was so dark that we could barely see a person standing three feet away. We held hands and ran to our cars.

Sharon G. Samuelson, wife of BYU president Cecil O. Samuelson, delivered this devotional on 6 January 2009.

As we drove, we could barely see what was in front of us. Even with the headlights on, our visibility was minimal. The windshield wipers were working hard to push away the constantly falling ash. As we slowly drove into the blackness, one thing stood out to me. Birds were flying directly into the beams of the headlights. It was obvious that they were seeking light in this time of turmoil and confusion.

After we got to our grandmother's house, the same thing happened. This time the birds were flying toward the windows of the home, often hitting the glass. It was apparent that they were disoriented and fearful. The only thing they wanted was light. They were searching for some kind of hope in the distant lights ahead.

It was obvious to my friend, as she related this experience, that when surrounded by darkness, confusion, fear, and panic, the birds sought the only hope of safety they had at that time—and to them their only hope was the light.

You young men and women are on a wonderful journey during this stage of your lives as you move ahead in gaining an education. There will be pathways to follow that you cannot yet imagine and experiences that will teach you many lessons of life. Just as the birds experienced darkness, confusion, and fear at one point in their lives, so will you. There are wonderful joys and blessings in your futures but challenges, fears, sorrows, and disappointments as well.

I am certain that even now you could relate numerous examples in your lives that illustrate all of these different circumstances. You have faced challenges and had disappointments as well as successes and wonderful achievements. You have been excited and joyful, and you have felt inadequate and fearful. However, you are so blessed that whenever you find yourselves amidst difficult and dark times in this troubled world, you have a safe and sure guiding light to bring you peace, joy, and happiness. It is available to anyone who would seek it in every nation, kindred, and tongue.

The scriptures teach us that “when the times of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fulness of [the] gospel” (D&C 45:28). The restored gospel of Jesus Christ is the sure light that shines for those who seek Him—even when we see the workings and mighty influence of the adversary in today’s world. Satan seeks to bring darkness into the lives of the children of our Father in Heaven—and thus into yours.

The previous scripture continues and states, “But they receive it not; for they perceive not the light, and they turn their hearts from me because of the precepts of men” (D&C 45:29). Many are like those in Lehi’s dream, described in the Book of Mormon, who could not hold fast to the iron rod—or the word of God—and go toward the tree of life. They succumbed to the temptations of Satan and to the pride, wisdom, and vanity of the world. This is much too common in the world in which you live today.

In Mosiah 16:9 we are taught that our Savior, Jesus Christ, “is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened.” Jesus and His gospel are the lights that can guide you throughout your journey here on earth. These lights are brighter and stronger than any darkness you will encounter in this life.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught this wonderful principle as he related Christ’s message to us in the Doctrine and Covenants: “And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you” (D&C 88:67). However, Christ’s light and the gospel message of light can be darkened in your own lives when you choose to disobey the commandments or when your faith grows dim.

Each of you makes choices every day. Some choices can keep you walking in the light; others can cause you to begin walking toward darkness. You make choices about those with whom you associate. Do they help instill the light of the gospel in your life? Do they walk

the path toward the light with you, or do they tend to nudge you in another direction?

The gospel teaches: “That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter” (D&C 50:24). Conversely, we are warned, “And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness” (D&C 50:23).

In September 1989, Joshua Dennis was a 10-year-old Scout who found himself alone, trapped, and lost on a ledge in an abandoned mine in Tooele County, Utah. He spent five days in pitch-black darkness as searchers frantically tried to find him. To this day, I can recall reading the accounts of this story and following the reports on television. I remember thinking how frightened I would be if I were the one lost or if it were one of my loved ones in such a circumstance. I could not imagine being alone in total darkness, not daring to move in any direction. I couldn’t see myself in that situation at any age—and for five days! Imagine what Joshua must have felt when he first heard the searchers and saw the light from a flashlight—a light that let him know he had been found and would soon be with his family.

When young Josh spoke at a fireside sometime after his recovery, he said, “I wasn’t alone in the mine. Heavenly Father sent angels to be with me. I didn’t see them, but I knew they were there because I was comforted” (in Carolyn Goates Campbell, “Hidden Treasure: Ten-Year-Old Josh Dennis Lost in Mine,” *Ensign*, August 1991, 35).

I am sure Josh had been taught that Jesus Christ is a light in our lives and that His light can be with us whatever darkness surrounds us. Josh surely knew that he had the Light of Christ with him. This light sustained him and thus helped him find the courage to be brave during his ordeal. It gave him the hope that he would be found.

Each one of you has the light of Jesus Christ within you. How wonderful that is for you

as you strive to discern what is truly of great worth in your life. The world of today will offer you many counterfeits to tempt you to turn away from the light of the gospel. Riches, power, and status are all worldly aspirations that have been built up to great importance in the eyes of men, but these can take you down the path toward darkness if you let them. Live so that you are worthy to have the Holy Ghost as a constant companion to help guide you in your choices and in the paths you take that will lead you in righteousness and eternal joy.

During President Gordon B. Hinckley’s service as our prophet, we heard often that the Church had come out of obscurity. We have become very visible, and our work, which is the work of our Savior, is being viewed by the world. It cannot and will not be hidden. This brings many challenges as well as opportunities for all of us. The adversary knows this and will attempt to dim the light of the gospel so that it cannot shine brightly in the world or in our lives. We must be a light of the gospel of Jesus Christ to others. Christ Himself commanded, “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27).

You wonderful young men and women are the leaders of the future. You will be leaders in your communities, in the Church, and, most important, in your families. You will not and cannot be hidden from the world. Others will view you not only as representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but also as representatives of the Savior and the message He taught. The Lord loves you and will bless you each day. He has given you the light of the gospel and has asked that you “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

That each one of you here will continually let the light of the gospel shine in your faces wherever you go and in whatever you do is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.