

Making Memories

JOHN SONNENBERG

Sensing the importance of this occasion and knowing how valuable your time is, I have decided to speak upon a subject that is vastly important to all of us—that of making memories.

Early Times

It was forty-eight years ago that my brother and I arrived in this beautiful valley from Chicago, Illinois, and enrolled as freshman at BYU. We were two bewildered young men as we gazed at those majestic mountains surrounding this valley. As newcomers from the fertile flatlands and cornfields of the Midwest, we were warmly welcomed by friendly students, most of whom were members of the Church. Our parents wanted us to be in a spiritual setting that would enhance our academic pursuits, so they encouraged us to come to Provo for our college education.

My parents, as well as my brother and sister and I, were born in Germany. I was born in the city of Schneidemuhl. (I've always had a hard time trying to spell that name. Now if any of you can spell it, I think you are deserving of a degree from BYU.) Today, the name of the city has been changed to Pila, and it lies behind the Iron Curtain and is part of Poland. Because of escalating financial problems, and at the suggestion of the local priesthood leaders,

many of the LDS people immigrated from Germany to the United States.

Upon arriving in the United States, we faced the devastating depression of 1929. We left unbelievable spiraling inflation in Germany and were immediately tossed into an economic depression in this country. Jobs were scarce, and my mother became the breadwinner as my dad looked anxiously day after day for work without success. He was unemployed for several years, and this caused him great discomfort.

As Nephi of old proclaimed, I was born of goodly parents. My father and mother were humble, prayerful, and obedient convert members of the Church. They always followed the counsel of the Church leaders. Their loyalty to the prophet and priesthood leaders was firmly rooted in their testimonies. They urged us to get as much education as possible—primarily because they had so little formal education themselves. They worked hard and long to help pay for our education, and I shall always be grateful for their sacrifice in our behalf.

John Sonnenberg was a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was delivered at Brigham Young University on 25 September 1988.

Sister Sonnenberg and I have been blessed with seven children. In fact, six of them have received their degrees here. Their companions have also attended BYU, and so we are indebted to you, the administration, the faculty, and the Church for your contributions toward their academic pursuits. In turn, our children have blessed us with thirty-two grandchildren, and we hope, President Holland, that you will have room for them and can do for them what your predecessors have done for us.

Precious Experiences

Since receiving the call to be a General Authority on October 6, 1984, I've had the opportunity to labor among the Saints as a member of the European area presidency with Elders Joseph B. Wirthlin and Russell C. Taylor. It was a choice experience to labor and serve among the Saints in the countries of Europe and Africa. We've witnessed much growth in this area.

I would like to share with you some of the memories and experiences we had while serving in Europe. As we toured the Portugal Lisbon Mission, I recall hearing the story of Sister Asencio Frango. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin has also told her conversion story in a conference address in October 1986. Sister Frango lived in the city of Funchal, on Madeira Island. She had been a nun for twenty years. As a matter of fact, she was a mother superior at a home for poor children and orphans. Hearing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, she attended her first meeting in a member's garage with a dirt floor, but the spirit of the meeting touched her heart. The elders began teaching her the gospel, and she listened. She read the Book of Mormon and gained a strong testimony. Later she requested to be baptized. A year later she went to the Swiss Temple to receive her endowments. Since becoming a member of the Church, she has found a new dimension of happiness and purpose to life.

In Cardiff, Wales, we held a regional conference in St. David's Hall with Elders Boyd K. Packer and Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve. The Saints from the Bristol area were also invited. The attendance was so large that we had to hold two sessions. The Spirit of the Lord prevailed as the members and visitors were enlightened by the testimony of these two special witnesses of Christ.

On another occasion, President Thomas S. Monson and his wife, Francis, came to Salzburg, Austria, for a regional conference. Over 4,000 Saints assembled in the concert hall, the Neues Grosfestspiel Haus, to hear an apostle of the Lord. It was the largest gathering of Saints in Austria.

Sister Sonnenberg and I were also privileged to attend the dedication of the Freiberg Temple. There we witnessed the gathering of a few thousand Saints who had come to participate in this great event. Most of them were from Germany, but some came from neighboring countries. The Freiberg Temple is beautiful, and the Saints in this area made many sacrifices for and behalf of those coming to the temple. Food and commodities were purchased months in advance by the local sisters in preparation for a dinner for the Brethren who would be attending the dedication. They were honored to have in attendance at the dedication President Hinckley and Elder Thomas S. Monson and their companions, and several members of the First Quorum of the Seventy along with their companions.

We witnessed the faith and dedication of these members of the Church. We heard their testimonies and their expressions of gratitude. We're grateful for the influence that they have had on our lives.

At the conclusion of the cornerstone laying and the dedication of that beautiful holy temple, we found it as difficult to say *auf wiedersehen* as they did. But the bus was waiting—tears filled their eyes as they waved their clean white handkerchiefs as a farewell gesture in hopes of a return visit. As we drove away, we

looked back at the Saints as they lingered on the temple grounds. We thanked the Lord silently for this glorious spiritual experience—another memory.

From there, we had the opportunity of traveling with President Hinckley and Elder Monson to Friedrichsdorf, where they broke ground and dedicated the land for the building of the first temple in West Germany. We also had the privilege of attending the open house of a beautiful temple in Sweden.

These precious experiences with the Saints of other countries have caused us to thank the Lord for his mercies unto the people of these lands and to us. As I think about these beautiful edifices that are being dedicated unto the Lord for the purpose of performing his sacred ordinances, I am reminded of a revelation found in D&C 131:1–4, which the Lord gave to the Prophet Joseph Smith in Ramus, Illinois, on July 12, 1843:

In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;

And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];

And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.

He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.

It is interesting to note that this revelation was given in a town that no longer exists. Section 130 of the Doctrine and Covenants was also given in Ramus, Illinois. Whether or not the town exists is of little importance. However, the revelations that came to the Prophet Joseph Smith there are applicable all over the world and will bless the Lord's children in every country where temples have been built.

The Saints who attend the temples are trained and taught the higher ordinances of the gospel. President Spencer W. Kimball said that "temples are built, in the first place, for the living and then for the dead." Temples promote a spirit of love in the family, in the home, in the

missionary work, and for those who receive the endowment. They enhance the spirit of service and reverence. They enhance the spirit of service of obedience to the commandments and covenants of the Lord. Temples also bring forth the spirit of sacrifice and the spirit of order. You are fortunate to have this beautiful temple in Provo, and I would encourage you to attend as often as possible.

Elder Boyd K. Packer said, "If we have participated in the ordinances of the gospel and have made our covenants with our Father in heaven, it does not really matter what other things we may have missed in this life. . . . We have not lived in vain." All other things of the world to other people will make no difference.

As I reflect upon the many experiences we have had in the past four years and cherish the memories we've made, I think of the opportunities each of you have to make memories of your experiences here at BYU. If I could invite you to do some things that would enlarge your perspective and strengthen your testimony, I would encourage you to keep the commandments of the Lord. In doing so, you will make memories that will enrich your lives in countless ways.

May I suggest that you first listen to the word of the Lord. The following revelation was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith as a voice of warning to the Saints during a special conference of elders of the Church in Hiram, Ohio, on November 1, 1831:

Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say: Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together.

For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated. . . .

And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days.

And they shall go forth and none shall stay them, for I the Lord have commanded them.

Behold, this is mine authority, and the authority of my servants, and my preface unto the book of my commandments, which I have given them to publish unto you, O inhabitants of the earth. . . .

Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear;

Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh. [D&C 1:1–2, 4–6, 11–12]

Memories from the Pacific

Recently we had the privilege of being in Samoa for its centennial celebration. It was one hundred years ago that Joseph Harry Dean and his wife and infant son set foot on Anuu and began to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. The centennial celebration marked the opening of the Samoa Mission in 1888. President Thomas S. Monson and Elder James E. Faust of the Council of the Twelve invited Joyce and me to accompany them on this historic occasion.

Thousands of people filled the Apia Park Stadium in Western Samoa. You had to come early in order to get a seat. The governor of Samoa attended, as well as the Speaker of the House, the lieutenant governor of American Samoa, and many other dignitaries and heads of state.

As President Monson spoke, he stated that “when God speaks and man obeys, that man will always be right.” I watched the attentiveness of those near me as they listened to him—also evident when Elder Faust spoke. As they spoke, I thought of the Lord’s admonition: “Whether by my own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38).

Then President Monson blessed the Saints by the power and authority of his holy calling. Thousands will be grateful for the testimonies and blessings given by the Brethren. The people came from the islands of Tutuila, Upola, and

Savaii on this memorable occasion, and their hearts were filled. To us it was a most memorable experience.

You might be interested to learn that in Samoa there are now 50,699 members of the Church. In June of 1888 Elder Joseph Harry Dean accepted a call to serve the Lord as a witness of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Polynesian people. Since then, there have been forty-one mission presidents and over 4,100 missionaries that have served in Samoa, most of them local members.

The first person to be baptized was a man by the name of Samuela Manoa, a native Samoan who had waited twenty-five years for someone to come and baptize him with power and authority and to administer in the ordinances thereof. Today there are eleven stakes of Zion, and it is not uncommon to have 80 or 90 percent attendance at their stake conferences. The faith of these Polynesian Saints and their eagerness to build the kingdom of God is commendable.

Another memorable experience was in Micronesia in the islands of Tarawa and the Gilbert Islands. We felt the power of prayer in those people’s lives. We witnessed the faith and dedication of the Saints in Fiji, where harmony is displayed among the members of the Church. Because of the political unrest in this country, the government leaders are asking, “How do you do it?”

The Church is growing in Vanuatu. Last year the branch president and his counselor and their wives went to the New Zealand Temple to be endowed and sealed. It was a great personal sacrifice and it took all of their savings. In fact, one of them sold his car. They couldn’t afford to take their children because of the expensive airplane fare. They also attended a magnificent pageant on the grounds of that beautiful temple. They returned to Port Vila in Vanuatu with added dedication to build up the Church in that area. Two local missionaries have been called, and the work is expanding.

As we visited these beautiful Melanesian people, we witnessed another miracle. A cyclone had swept through the island. Huge trees were uprooted and many, many buildings were destroyed, but the chapel was spared. There was no damage although two huge trees fell at the edge of the fence.

We witnessed the protective hand of the Lord on Rarotonga Island when a devastating cyclone severely damaged much of that island. On an emergency visit with President John Lasater, we saw how the Lord preserved our chapels. Cyclones are a way of life in the islands, but so is faith. The people's faith and courage are almost indescribable.

We have frequently gone to Tonga. On one visit we went to reorganize the Nuku'alofa Tonga South Stake. On Sunday evening following stake conference they had a special fireside where the king of Tonga was being honored on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. Members of the royal family as well as many other dignitaries from several countries were in attendance. The stake center was filled to capacity with over 1,200 people. Tongan music and the Spoken Word were presented. There was a Tongan choir of some 200 children, youth, and adults. At the appointed hour the king arrived and sat with regal dignity on a special chair. The king is head of the Wesleyan church. It was a wonderful experience to see and hear his granddaughter sing a solo to him, "I Am a Child of God." That young girl also sang with the choir and then sang, "I Love You, Grandpa." I think hearts were beating a little faster that day as we all felt the influence of the Spirit. I hope, with the passing of time, those memories will always remain fresh.

Elder James E. Faust was in attendance. Both he and I were asked to speak, and we bore our testimonies. After Elder Faust bore his testimony, he felt impressed to bless the king. The Saints and friends of the Church felt the power and authority of one who was called of God as a special witness.

The king responded graciously. At the conclusion of the fireside, the king personally greeted Elder and Sister Faust and Sister Sonnenberg and me and pronounced that Elder Faust is an apostle of the Church.

How grateful we were for the prayers and sustaining influence of the Spirit. Here was another choice experience that has been etched into our memory book.

The people of Polynesia have many talents and gifts. There is a great promise to the Polynesian people in 2 Nephi 10:21. The scripture says, "But great are the promises of the Lord unto them who are upon the isles of the sea; wherefore as it says isles, there must be more than this, and they are inhabited also by our brethren."

Sister Sonnenberg and I have truly come to love these people who are our brethren.

Another memorable experience was when we toured the Tahiti Mission along with President George Hilton, the mission president, his wife, and Elder Victor Cave, the Regional Representative. We had to fly down to Rurutu Island, which is about three hours south of Papeete.

As we arrived on this remote island, we were greeted warmly with leis and love and sincere embraces. It's their way of showing "thanks for coming." As we drove along a lonely road, I learned that President Hilton had served a mission here as a young man some thirty years before. Now the Lord had called him to be the mission president. This man had blessed the Saints and bore witness to them for two years. To come again to help them now was exciting for him. He knew the language, the people, the Saints, and the missionaries. But most important, he knew the Lord and was leading this mission with love, kindness, and compassion.

We went to a small, improvised meeting-house and held a wonderful testimony meeting. Sister Mitiara, the district Relief Society president, fed us and fed us and fed us.

I wondered about the five loaves and two small fishes spoken of in John 6:9.

Sister Mitiara asked if we would visit her eighty-six-year-old elderly mother who was ill. At President Hilton's suggestion we went to her little adobe home. The outside of this humble home was beautiful with colorful flowers by the front steps. As we walked into the home, we saw only one chair and a bed or two. It was a very humble setting. Sister Mitiara's mother is not a member of the Church. As we walked into her bedroom, a sweet spontaneous smile came over her face. She spoke to us very quietly and with difficulty, but she recognized Dr. George Hilton. Her eyesight had been restored by him in Papeete six months before when he performed delicate retinal surgery on her. President Hilton has restored the sight to many people both spiritually and with his professional skills. The operation was done free of charge. She now recognized him and expressed her thanks. She then asked if we could give her a blessing by the power of the priesthood. President Hilton and I blessed this sweet lady in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. She thanked us, quietly and sincerely.

We then flew to Tubuai—another tiny island in the Pacific that is about an hour's flight from Rurutu. It was here on this island that Addison Pratt baptized the first convert in the Pacific, Ambrose Alexander, on June 15, 1844, just twelve days before the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were martyred in Carthage, Illinois. Addison Pratt was the first missionary to the South Pacific. He was a member of the Quorum of the Seventy and served valiantly to bring the light of the gospel to the Polynesian people. Today, we have over 252,000 members in the Pacific area, with fifty-eight stakes, eleven missions, almost five hundred buildings, and five temples. The Lord has truly blessed these people.

We have had many more memorable experiences that display courage, faith, and perseverance. We have seen and felt the love of

the Maoris in New Zealand. Elder Matthew Cowley made a great contribution here, and they have a great love for him. The scripture "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5–6) describes his total commitment to these people and to the Lord.

While touring the New Zealand Christchurch Mission with President and Sister Dean Baxter, we were driving along a highway one day in a van. Two elders were in the front seat, the mission president and his wife in front of us, and Sister Sonnenberg and I in the back of the van. As we were driving along, I asked the elders to stop a short distance ahead so we could take a picture of some sheep grazing on the lush grass. We moved ahead about fifty yards and Sister Baxter got out of the van to take a picture. At that precise moment, unnoticed to us, a camper passed us going in the opposite direction. The camper stopped about a block behind us. At first the elders thought they were in distress or had car trouble. But to our amazement, while the rest of us were still in the van, the mission president looked behind the back seat and saw someone coming toward us. He immediately noticed that it was his brother and his wife. They had come to tour the North and South Island. Here, on a lonely road in New Zealand, a brother meets his brother from Utah. There were, of course, warm and happy embraces. President Baxter had said that he wanted his brother to meet us, but had wondered how this would ever be possible. Oh, yes, the Lord directs his servants.

Our visits among the Saints have been happy ones, and we have stored many memories of spiritual experiences.

Perhaps I can best describe the faith and testimony of these people by reading a poem by Shondelle Pratt. She's a wonderful, talented teenager. She has the kind of faith that is reflective of the Saints in Australia—a land that has been blessed abundantly by the Lord.

*When the Savior came down to the earth,
He said he'd come again.
So we battled to stay righteous
Through the wind and stormy rain.*

*We kept the ten commandments,
And all did so abide.
But when he didn't come along,
Some of us began to slide.*

*Thru the stormy seas and billows
Of life's stony-crusted path,
We fought for straight and narrow,
Hoping that he would embark.*

*I've never, ever doubted,
Though sometimes I've had to think.
I know that he will come again—
I'll never have to blink.*

*It's hard to write a poem
On a person some can't see
And hear the things that he had done—
One time it was for me.
He struggled on that bloodied cross
For all of us, you see.
He did it so that we could live
With him eternally.*

*It's what my dreams describe him as
That keeps my feelings clear
And wants me to keep precious
All the things that I hold dear.*

*He has that special kind of face
That shines for all to see
And a special kind of wisdom
That makes you want to be
A person that's just like him,
With love and patience sweet,
And have all of his righteous ways
From his head down to his feet.*

*Someday I know I'll meet him,
And all round will abide*

*As one big happy family—
I'll be right by his side.*

*So just when life has let you down
And tempers are debating,
Don't take upon you worldly ways;
Remember, someone's waiting.*

I have witnessed the gift of giving and the gift of gratitude. I've come to know some of the relatives and friends of Meli Mulipola (although I don't know him personally) of whom President Monson speaks. Two Polynesian women helped Meli Mulipola to the village and led the way. He had lost his eyesight but had heard of the restoration of the gospel. His life conformed to the teachings of the Savior.

One who held the sacred priesthood of God was visiting the small island in the Pacific. A blessing was given and tears fell from his sightless eyes and upon his lava-lava, or native dress. He dropped to his knees and prayed, "O God, thou knowest I am blind. Thy servants have blessed me that my sight may return. Whether in thy wisdom I see light or whether I see darkness all the days of my life, I will be eternally grateful for the truth of Thy gospel, which I now see and which provides the light of my life."

As a General Authority, we are that to all the Church, whether in South America, Asia, the United States, or the Philippines. We should have the same love and respect for all our brothers and sisters. And inasmuch as we have labored in Europe and the Pacific area, I elected to recount some of our memorable experiences there.

As You Live, Learn All You Can

The people of the Pacific and Europe are choice. They sing beautifully. They have the gift of courage, love, obedience, prayer, and faith that we have witnessed among you. They express and display a loyalty to the prophets of

God. They are dedicated to serve their fellowmen and will go the extra mile.

As I think of the marvelous opportunities that you have here at BYU, I think of your motto: “Enter to learn, go forth to serve.” To continually learn is part of the gospel plan. In the thirteenth article of faith it states: “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” Your education is an important part of your preparation for joy and service in the Lord’s kingdom.

President Monson said:

The past is behind you, honor it.

The future is ahead, prepare for it.

The present is here, live in it.

As you live, listen to the voice of the Lord. As you live, learn all you can. The more you listen, the more you learn, and the more your opportunity to serve will be enhanced.

The Lord has given many revelations concerning our learning experiences. Learn by studying the scriptures. I like what the scriptures teach us about learning:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. [Hebrews 5:8]

But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God. [2 Nephi 9:29]

O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God. [Alma 37:35]

Seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. [D&C 88:118]

Your time at BYU is short. I would say to you, “Relish the moment.” And I would couple that with Psalms 118:24, “This is the day which

the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

President Spencer W. Kimball said, “In all the world, Brigham Young University is the greatest institution of learning. . . . The uniqueness of Brigham Young University lies in its special role—education for eternity—which it must carry in addition to the usual tasks of a university. This means concern . . . for not only the ‘whole man’ but for the ‘eternal man.’” (*Education for Eternity*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year [Provo, 12 September 1967], p. 1)

And in an address to the BYU faculty (12 September 1966, pp. 5–6), President Ernest L. Wilkinson said,

I hope this school can never be totally described in the terms of other universities, no matter how celebrated. Fundamentally our roots spring from Palmyra, rather than Cambridge. . . . If most institutions of higher learning aspire to be only communities of scholars, we are privileged to be also a congregation of disciples. . . .

My concern that men of letters and science at B.Y.U. be men of God before anything else must not be construed to support the substitution of rectitude rather than academic competence. . . . Our academic training must be as impeccable as our lives.

Listen, learn, live, and serve, and as you do so you will carve out memories that will be etched into your heart and soul.

One of our sons, Brent, expressed a thought of a commitment to service:

Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the wrong. Sometime in life you will have been all of these.

With a personal vision, you are in the driver’s seat. The clarity, context, and focus that you develop is powerful. Promise yourself to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind. To talk health, happiness, and prosperity to every person

you meet. To make all your friends feel that they are special. To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true. To think only of the best, to work only for the best, and expect only the best. To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own. To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future. To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile. To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others. To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

Our memories and experiences, our friendships and closeness that we have developed will last with us wherever we go. In closing, let

me share with you a final thought for us all to consider.

I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again. [Attributed to Stephen Grellet, 1773–1855]

I bear witness to you that this church is true, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. I bear witness that the Book of Mormon is the word of God. I testify to you that President Ezra Taft Benson is a living prophet. I share my testimony with you, and bless you by the power and authority vested in me. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.