

Never Give Up on Anyone

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Evergreen International 18th Annual Conference
September 20, 2008



I am grateful for the opportunity to address you in this important conference. I know something of the faith and devotion of those who support and encourage this wonderful organization, and I am honored to have been given the opportunity to speak to you this morning. I express appreciation to the officers and supporters of Evergreen International, and commend you for the important work in which you are engaged.

I have given much thought and prayer to what I might say to you this morning, and I hope that the Spirit will guide me in my words. At the same time, it is my fervent prayer that my message might be a blessing to some who are here.

As you can appreciate, one of the most wonderful aspects of serving as a General Authority of the church is the opportunity to have close association with the Prophet and to frequently hear his words and his testimony, as well as his expressions of love and faith.

President Thomas S. Monson has had a remarkable life of service in the Lord's Kingdom. He was called as an Apostle in 1963, 45 years ago.

He is renowned, in and out of the church, for his wonderful and inspiring stories. President Monson's practice of teaching is much like that of the Savior, who often taught using stories and parables. Imbedded in every President Monson story are important messages and fundamental Gospel principles that will bless the lives of those who have ears to hear.

One General Authority suggested that we need to listen carefully to Thomas S. Monson stories so that we don't just hear a nice story – but rather, we learn lessons applicable to our own lives as we strive to fully live the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In August, President Thomas S. Monson celebrated his 81st Birthday.

At a small birthday celebration, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf and President Henry B. Eyring gave touching tributes to our prophet. In a few words, each expressed his love and support and made a few observations about President Monson. The thing that stood out for me was the statement that "*He focuses on the one.*" He focuses on the individual—one at a time.

One of Jesus' most memorable parables taught us to focus on the one. We all know Luke's account of the Parable of the Shepherd leaving the ninety and nine and going to find the one (Luke 15). That principle has become a fundamental part of Christian belief and practice.

I want to begin my message with a story told by President Monson:

This happened years ago when he was a Mission President in Toronto.

One of the missionaries called on the phone and said: "President, I smoked a pack of cigarettes, so send me home".

"Let's talk about the cigarettes tomorrow. I want you to come to the mission home and get a good night's rest and then we can talk tomorrow." President Monson brought him to the mission home, treated him like part of the family, fed him, made sure he was treated well and got a good night's sleep. He didn't talk about the incident that evening. When the missionary persisted, President Monson said: "We'll take care of that tomorrow."

The next morning Sister Monson fed him a good breakfast and he was involved in the other things going on at the mission home.

President Monson put off talking about the problem until well through the day. He said: "By afternoon we were talking about what he needed to do to stay in the mission field and be a good missionary."

He kept him. He stayed and completed his mission. A life was changed. A life was saved.

Was the Mission President disappointed in the behavior of this missionary? I'm sure he was. I don't know exactly how he expressed that disappointment. However it was handled, it was eclipsed by the obvious expressions of confidence and love that enabled the missionary to overcome his challenges and to go forward and complete his mission successfully. Clearly, the missionary must have had *some* desire to stay, but so much of what happened here was because of the love, understanding, forgiveness, and encouragement of this great mission president.

Some may say, “Well, he handled it perfectly because he was a great man, who became a great Apostle and Prophet. I can’t be expected to handle difficult situations so well.”

He didn’t call the Church travel office and arrange for a return flight for the missionary so that travel plans would be ready when he arrived at the mission home. He didn’t give up on that missionary. Do you suppose that President Monson ever told him he couldn’t be smoking cigarettes and be a missionary? I’m sure that he did. But that came after a rich outpouring of love. He deliberately put off addressing the problem until he had plenty of time to manifest his love and do it in a warm and very engaging way.

Some of us like the scriptural direction to “reprove betimes with sharpness” and then follow-up “with showing forth an increase of love.” President Monson’s approach seemed to be to show forth an increase of love before ever reprovng. Then whatever reprovng took place was followed up again with an increase of love. It seems like this missionary was sandwiched by love. Surely the inappropriate behavior was clearly labeled as such by the Mission President. But the important message to me is that the prelude and the postlude were strains of love and support. For that missionary, it made all the difference in the world.

We may not handle challenges with such wisdom, grace and finesse, but we can learn from his example and his experience.

I don’t recall President Monson saying much about how this missionary got along after this incident. He may have struggled from time to time, but he stayed, and he completed his mission. Regardless of how serene or how turbulent our lives might be, I think there are important lessons for each of us in this wonderful story.

I’ve heard President Monson say many times: “I like to focus on an individual.” He’ll often ask others to help. He likes to say to them: “*Would you like to paint a bright spot on your soul today?*” Then he solicits their help.

On another occasion, President Monson told me of an experience he had with a man he met many years ago. I won’t share details, as President Monson is still seeking to bless the life of this individual, so I won’t say enough that anyone could discern who he was speaking about.

This is an amazing story to me:

The relationship began many years ago. This man was married and was not a very active Latter-day Saint. He never had taken his wife to the temple.

President Monson had occasion to meet and speak with him and learned of his circumstances. The man

was not wealthy, or famous, nor did he occupy a high position in society, government or church. He was just a good man and President Monson knew that. President Monson shared an interest with him. When President Monson learned that he had not taken his wife to the temple to be sealed, he offered to officiate as the sealer when that day came and told the man he would look forward to that opportunity. President Monson has perpetuated the friendship and made periodic contact, even though the man never responded to his challenge and never accepted his invitation. “When you take your wife to the temple, you let me know. I’d be happy to officiate at the sealing.”

That hasn’t happened. Thomas S. Monson told me: “I still keep in contact with him and I continue to remind him of my desire for him and his wife.” I suspect that they enjoy the friendship with this great man and great leader of our church. I imagine there have been many prayers from many people concerning this matter. As President Monson told me of this relationship he showed very little disappointment in the fact that his efforts have not born the fruit he hoped for. He wasn’t discouraged as he told me the story. He remains positive and hopeful and said something profound to me. He said: “I **never** give up on anybody. I will never give up trying to help them.” What an example!

Some might say: That man had his chance. He has had an Apostle reach out to him for decades and hasn’t responded. President Monson should now reach out to someone else. However, Thomas S. Monson hasn’t looked at it that way – rather – his attitude has been, and I quote: “**I never give up on anyone. I’ll reach out to him and encourage him as long as I’m able.**”

I love the children’s song “Follow the Prophet.” You know the words to the chorus:

Follow the Prophet, Follow the Prophet, Follow the Prophet, don’t go astray.

Follow the Prophet, Follow the Prophet, Follow the Prophet, he knows the way.

The 9th Verse is particularly poignant:

Now we have a world where people are confused.

If you don’t believe it, go and watch the news.

We can get direction all along the way.

If we heed the prophets – follow what they say.

To gain perspective on the times in which we find ourselves and the challenges that are before us, I share with you a 1998 quote from President Gordon B. Hinckley:

“Never before, at least not in our generation, have the forces of evil been so blatant, so brazen, so aggressive as they are today. Things we dared not speak about in earlier times are now constantly

projected into our living rooms. All sensitivity is cast aside as reporters and pundits speak with a disgusting plainness of things that can only stir curiosity and lead to evil.” (Quote GBH *Ensign*, Nov 1998, p 98, 99)

This coarsening of our society and our culture has led to many distortions of truth and has left much of society confused.

In this environment, we have the great blessing of being led by prophets, seers and revelators.

I would like to speak a little about “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” This inspired and wonderful document gives us understanding and perspective that are invaluable to us in these latter days.

I want to quote from President Hinckley’s message given at the General Relief Society Meeting in October of 1995, where President Hinckley first introduced the proclamation on the family. I think the fact that the President of the Church chose to introduce this historic and inspired document first to the women of the Church in a Relief Society Broadcast, rather than General Conference, is truly remarkable. I think it was a manifestation by the leadership of the Church that they hold women in the highest esteem and recognize their all-important contribution to the strength of families and therefore to the strength of the Church.

Prior to reading the proclamation, President Hinckley made this profound introduction:

“With so much of sophistry that is passed off as truth, with so much of deception concerning standards and values, with so much of allurements and enticement to take on the slow stain of the world, we have felt to warn and forewarn. In furtherance to this we the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles now issue a proclamation to the Church and to the world as a declaration and a reaffirmation of standards, doctrines, and practices relative to the family which the prophets, seers, and revelators of this Church have repeatedly stated throughout its history.” (*Ensign*, Nov 1995, p.98)

I now quote from “**The Family: A Proclamation to the World**”

“WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential

characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.”

“THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The messages and truths contained in the proclamation are so important because we live in a world filled with counterfeit messages. We are bombarded with false and evil messages. Consider the popular advertising slogan: “What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas.” Selfishness abounds and is cultivated by the world and the media. “It’s all about me”.

This scripture from the New Testament seems appropriate for our time: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8).

In a world where counterfeit messages abound, it makes it much more important that we know the will of God. As He has in the past, God has blessed us with a prophet on the earth today to guide us in times of turmoil and deception. We need prophets and we are blessed to have their guidance. Like the words to the children’s song: “We can get direction all along the way – if we heed the prophets, follow what they say.”

Many years ago, I was serving as a Bishop. A member of my ward, a recent convert, came to me for advice. She was a sweet and wonderful person, but concluded that she wouldn't be able to live the law of Chastity. With tears of anguish and deep disappointment in herself, she said to me: "Bishop, What the Church expects is too much!"

My response to her was: "*It is not what the Church expects; it is what the Lord expects.*" Too often, on a variety of subjects, we hear people say that the Church expects too much, but the important thing to remember is – the Law of Chastity is the will of the Lord.

These are the commandments of a loving God, a loving Father. He expects a lot of us because He loves us and He knows best. He has taught us that wickedness is never happiness.

He understands every one of us, and He understands our struggles, our challenges, and He knows our hearts. Like any loving parent, He wants us to be happy and He has provided a plan for us that leads to happiness – if we follow it.

Elder M. Russell Ballard said: "One cannot look at suffering, regardless of its causes or origins, without feeling pain and compassion. I can understand why someone who lacks an eternal perspective might see the horrifying news footage and starving children and man's inhumanity to man and shake a fist at the heavens and cry, "If there is a God, how could he allow such things to happen?" The answer is not easy, *but it isn't that complicated, either.* God has put His plan in motion. It proceeds through natural laws that are, in fact, God's laws. Since they are His, He is bound by them, as are we." (*Ensign*, May 1995, 22)

As we teach and understand that wickedness does not produce happiness, we need to focus on the way the Savior taught us to deal with those who have sinned. One of the most powerful messages in the New Testament is contained in John Chapter 8:

"Jesus went unto the mount of Olives."

"And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.

"And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

"They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

"Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou?

"This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

"So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

"And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

"And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

"When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?

"She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:1-11).

We do not know if there were other expressions of love and encouragement, but we do know:

He did not condemn her.

How do you think she felt towards him?

He truly loved her and He saved her.

Did she follow His counsel to go and sin no more?

We don't know.

Would it have changed His attitude if she had? Or if she hadn't?

If He encountered her again, would He have said "I can't believe you didn't do what I told you?"

I am confident that Jesus would continue to show forth love towards her and not CONDEMN her, while still identifying the sin as such.

Like President Monson said, I'm sure the Lord would say: "I don't give up on anyone." Would a Savior give up on someone? Would a Redeemer give up on anyone?

The 64th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants teaches us the Lord's position on forgiveness: "I the Lord will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men" (D&C 64:10).

Returning to the life of the Savior, we read a remarkable illustration of love and forgiveness in Luke Chapter 7:

"And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

"And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

"And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

"Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what

manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

“And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

“There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

“And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?”

“Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

“And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

“Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

“My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

“Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

“And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

“And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?”

“And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace” (Luke 7:36-50).

President Spencer W. Kimball taught about judgment: “The Lord can judge men by their thoughts as well as by what they say and do, for He knows even the intents of their hearts; but this is not true of humans. We hear what people say, we see what they do, but being *unable to discern what they think or intend, we often judge wrongfully* if we try to fathom the meaning and motives behind their actions and place on them our own interpretation.... The Lord will do the judging in the final analysis” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball, 2006, p 89-101*).

Having established the need for love and forgiveness, I turn to the Atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ. It is the Atonement that activates and energizes the love we have discussed.

It is the Atonement that nurtures and enables the sinner on his path back into the glow of approbation and approval of a loving and kind God.

It is the Atonement that is the soothing balm that comforts the troubled and aching heart, and gives hope to the parent, the sibling, the friend, the spouse, or the child of the one who has let go of the iron rod.

In 2002, soon after I was called to be a General Authority, I had the great blessing of being assigned to be companion to Elder Neal A. Maxwell at a stake conference. He was still functioning well, but was struggling with the ravages of leukemia, as was well known by the members of the church.

I was amazed at his kindness and compassion, and his ability to focus on individuals. More people than I could count came to shake his hand and told him that they personally were suffering from cancer, or they had a family member or loved one that was suffering from cancer or some other malady. In every case, Elder Maxwell was kind and considerate and interested in the individual. He would usually say, write down your name and address on a piece of paper and give it to me. Later he told me that when he would return to his office he would write many letters expressing love and encouragement to those who looked to him for counsel and direction. I learned a lot about compassion as I watched a Disciple of Christ reach out to others with loving kindness.

Elder Maxwell told me that he always used two scriptures when trying to give comfort and perspective to those who were suffering from disease or pain of some other kind. Elder Maxwell said, “These scriptures give me comfort and understanding and I want to share with them what I know.”

The first scripture is from the Book of 1st Nephi: “I know that he (God) loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17).

The second one is from the Book of Alma. It is a beautiful statement on the Atonement: “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11).

Pain covers not only physical injury or illness, but the pain from heartache, anguish, remorse. The Atonement covers the pain from sin and it can cover the anguish and anxiety that come from a lack of understanding.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen said: “Each of us will taste the bitter ashes of life, from sin and neglect to sorrow and disappointment. But the Atonement of Christ can lift us up in beauty from our ashes on the wings of a sure promise of immortality and eternal life. He will thus lift us up, not only at the end of life, but in each day of our lives. ‘Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength...They that wait upon the Lord shall . mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall

walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:28-31). (Bruce C. Hafen, *Ensign*, April 1990, 7)

Doctrine & Covenants, Section 123 states: “Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed” (D&C 123:17).

I have said very little on how to resist temptation. I share a few quotes that I love and which seem appropriate:

“We will not make a serious mistake without first having ignored the prompting not to do it.” (Boyd K. Packer) We need to cultivate the influence of the Spirit in our lives.

“Every temptation yields to immersion in the scriptures.” (James E. Faust)

We must have the *constant blessings* and the *marvelous influence* that comes to each of us from the study of the scriptures. When temptations are stronger, we must turn to the scriptures for fortification and turn to the Lord in prayer. I repeat President Faust’s statement, “Every temptation yields to immersion in the scriptures.”

“And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

President Boyd K. Packer loves Hymn #114 “Come unto Him.”

He loves the hymn because of the wonderful message contained in the text.

I’ve heard him say, “If you know what this hymn teaches, then you know all that I know.

“I wander through the still of night, when solitude is everywhere. Alone beneath the starry light, And yet I know that God is there.

I kneel upon the grass and pray; an answer comes without a voice. It takes my burden all away And makes my aching heart rejoice.

When I am filled with strong desire And ask a boon of him, I see no miracle of living fire, But what I ask flows into me.

And when the tempest rages high I feel no arm around me thrust, But every storm goes rolling by When I repose in him my trust.

It matters not what may befall, What threatening hand hangs over me. He is my rampart through it all, My refuge from mine enemy.

Come unto him all ye depressed, Ye erring souls whose eyes are dim, Ye weary ones who long for rest. Come unto him! Come unto Him!

(Psalms 55: 16-17, 22; Matthew 11:28-30)

Part of my testimony is that “We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men, indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul – We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”

In conclusion, I bear witness that we have a loving Father in Heaven. He is a loving Father. He has provided a Plan of Happiness for us. He has given us a Savior, His son – Jesus Christ. I bear witness that Jesus Christ lives and that He is our Savior and our Redeemer.

I pray that we will *Follow the Prophet*, and that we will *Never Give Up On Anyone*.

As a servant of the Lord, I invoke the blessings of Heaven upon you, and I express my love to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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