

### Personal prayer

The scriptures give us many promises regarding the power and the need of personal prayer. Jesus commanded men: "Ye must watch and pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him.

"And as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church, among my people who do repent and are baptized in my name. Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you" (3 Ne. 18:15-16).

"Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you," the Lord continued, "ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.

"Therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name;

"And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you" (3 Ne. 18:18-20).

### Family prayer

Jesus Christ counsels man to have family prayer. He said, "Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed" (3 Ne. 18:21).

Very few pray too much. It is not one of our weaknesses.

Parents have the sacred responsibility to teach their children the

importance and value of prayer, and the responsibility to teach their children how to pray. In many homes, even some of the best prayers are ignored and neglected. Prayer is sacred and Jesus said: "Trifle not with sacred things" (D&C 6:12).

Another blessing available through prayer is feeling the love of God in your heart and soul. We have in the scriptures this sacred promise: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure" (Moro. 7:48).

As the sons and daughters of a living God, a living Heavenly Father, we should stay close to him by humble prayer. We should stay close to him with a clean life, that our hearts may find peace in all of life's sacred opportunities and blessings. I so pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Marion G. Romney

We have just listened to Elder Bernard P. Brockbank, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

Elder Marvin J. Ashton, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will now address us.

## Elder Marvin J. Ashton

When a choice plant became root bound and began to deteriorate, a young friend of ours decided to transplant it to a larger container. Carefully he lifted the greenery from its small pot and put it into its larger home, trying to disturb the roots and

soil as little as possible. The novice gardener watched and waited. To his dismay, the plant still struggled. Our friend expressed his frustration to an experienced gardener who offered his services. When the plant was placed in the gardener's hands, he turned

the pot upside down, pulled out the plant, shook the soil from the roots, and clipped and pulled all the stragglers from the root system. Replacing the plant into the pot, he vigorously pushed the soil tightly around the plant. Soon the plant took on new life and grew.

How often in life do we set our own roots into the soil of life and become root bound? We may treat ourselves too gently and defy anyone to disturb the soil or trim back our root system. Under these conditions we too must struggle to make progress. Oh, change is hard! Change can be rough.

The Lord does not want His church to become root bound and stagnant. Constant revelation through the prophets is needed for the growth of His kingdom.

### Progress through change

There is nothing so unchanging, so inevitable as change itself. The things we see, touch, and feel are always changing. Relationships between friends, husband and wife, father and son, brother and sister are all dynamic, changing relationships. There is a constant that allows us to use change for our own good, and that constant is the revealed eternal truths of our Heavenly Father.

We need not feel that we must forever be what we presently are. There is a tendency to think of change as the enemy. Many of us are suspect of change and will often fight and resist it before we have even discovered what the actual effects will be. When change is thought through carefully, it can produce the most rewarding and profound experiences in life. The changes we make must fit the Lord's purposes and patterns.

As opportunity for change reaches into our lives, as it always will, we must ask, "Where do I need development? What do I want out of life? Where do I want to go? How

can I get there?" Weighing alternatives very carefully is a much needed prerequisite as one plans changes. In God's plan we are usually free to choose the changes we make in our lives and we are always free to choose how we will respond to the changes that come. We need not surrender our freedoms. But just as a compass is valuable to guide us out of the dense forest, so the gospel points the way as we walk the paths of life.

C. S. Lewis indicated there is often pain in change when he wrote of God's expectations for His children: "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace" (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York: MacMillan Co., 1960, p. 160).

Yes, there is pain in change, but there is also great satisfaction in recognizing that progress is being achieved. Life is a series of hills and valleys and often the best growth comes in the valleys. Change is a meaningful part of repentance. Some are unable to repent because they are unwilling to change.

### Example of prison

Recently I was participating in a groundbreaking ceremony for a chapel at the Utah State Prison. After

the ceremonies, Warden Morris invited Governor Scott Matheson and me to take a tour of the facilities. We had noticed the extra care that had been taken to make the grounds around the maximum-security building pleasing and beautiful. When we asked the warden who had done the work, he indicated that two inmates had been given time outside of their cells to improve the landscape. We asked if we could meet the two men. The warden took us into the maximum facility to see them. As Marvel and Brown shuffled toward us from their restricted confinements on death row, we felt that the look on their faces reflected, "What have we done wrong now?"

"We want to compliment you men on the work you have done on the grounds," we said. "The flower beds and vegetable gardens look beautiful and well kept. Congratulations on your good work."

The change that came over their expressions was marvelous. The unexpected words of praise had given them reason for self-esteem. Someone had noticed that their efforts had changed a rocky, weed-filled yard into a beautiful garden. Sadly, they had failed earlier to make productive gardens out of the rocky, weed-covered fields of their own lives. But we hold hope for men like these who could see a need for change in one area and had accomplished such good. Perhaps their part in changing the gardens will lead to improvement in their own lives.

William James once said, "The greatest discovery of my generation is that [we] can change [our] circumstances by changing [our] attitudes of mind" (cited in *Vital Quotations*, comp. Emerson Roy West, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968, p. 19). Jesus Christ helped people from all walks of life reach heights they had never dreamed of by teaching them to walk in new, secure paths.

### Adverse circumstances

Many begin their lives in such dire and adverse circumstances that change seems impossible. Let me share with you some examples of impossible beginnings.

The first example is a child who had an extremely unhappy home life. His family moved from one state to another until he was eight years of age. He was often beaten by his father who was either too strict or not strict enough, according to his mood at the time. The boy spent many of his early years sleeping in buses, train stations, and cheap hotels. At the age of fourteen he was arrested as a runaway. Both family and friends classified him as untrustworthy, often violent, and a loner.

The second example is a boy who was frail at birth. Throughout his childhood he had a tendency toward infection. His frail body seemed unable to hold his oversized head. His father worried that people considered his son "addled," and on one occasion he beat the boy publicly. After his mother had lost three previous children, she wrapped herself in black and withdrew.

In the third instance, a young man came from circumstances of near poverty. His family was forced to move more than once because of financial difficulties. He had little, if any, formal schooling. "His mother reported that he was less inclined to read and study than any of the other children" (Francis M. Gibbons, *Joseph Smith: Martyr, Prophet of God*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, p. 26). Because neighbors considered many of his ways and ideas strange, he was ostracized by his peers. All of his life he was hounded by the law and found himself constantly in difficulty.

Certain steps can help one make constructive, worthwhile changes in life. "When you climb up a ladder,

you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel" (*History of the Church*, 6:306-7). In order to make significant changes in our lives, we must accept our Father in Heaven and His truths. The prophet Alma in the Book of Mormon said, "Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" (Al. 5:14).

#### Four steps make change valuable

Let me suggest four important steps in making change a valuable tool in our lives:

First, we must understand the need to change. An unexamined life is not worth living. A new bishop shared with me an experience that frustrated him. He had a young lady in his ward who was not living the way she should. When he counseled her, she would bristle and say that he should be willing to accept her the way she was. She would not accept the fact that "the way she was" was just not good enough for her bishop, for her Heavenly Father, and most important, for herself. Being aware of the fault and the need to change is a most important step. *The recognition of the need to change has to be a greater force than the luxury of staying the same.*

Second, the facts must be authentic. We need to know how, what, where, and why to change. The gospel of Jesus Christ can help us set short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals by teaching us who we are, where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going. With this knowledge, a person will have greater strength to improve.

Third, a system for change must be established. It was Emerson who said, A man who sits "on the cushion of advantages, goes to sleep. When he is pushed, tormented,

defeated, he has been put on his wits, . . . [learns] moderation and real skill" ("Compensation," *The Complete Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., 1929, p. 161).

Our change must be planned and orderly. After our system for change is established, it must be followed through to completion, even though it may disturb our very root system.

Fourth, we must be totally committed to our plan for change. A Chinese proverb says, "Great souls have wills; feeble souls have only wishes." Unless we have the will to improve, all the other steps to change will be wasted. This last step separates the winners from the losers.

#### Three examples

Earlier I mentioned three examples of people living in the most dire circumstances. The first young man's life was a series of continuing arrests for everything from vagrancy to armed robbery and murder. Never recognizing the need to change, he was one day convicted of murder.

The second was a description of the early years of Thomas A. Edison. From a beginning that seemed almost too much to overcome, he was able to change and build. Though he was once judged retarded, he proved himself to be one of the greatest inventors of all time. His personal commitment changed the whole world for the better.

The third tells the story of a young man and his early days in the northeastern part of this country. He was born in 1805 during a hard and cold Vermont winter. His name—Joseph Smith. His beginnings were difficult. Life was a series of struggles—not only physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. But here was a young man who recognized the need for improvement through change and submitted to an authority greater than himself. From

tremendously difficult beginnings he sought change and ushered in the last dispensation. His faith, prayers, and works brought to the earth the greatest, most profound changes in the latter days.

It has been said by Bruce Barton that, "When we're through changing, we're through." There is no age when we are too old or too young or just too middle-aged to change. Perhaps old age really comes when a person finally gives up the right, challenge, and joy of changing. We should remain teachable. How easy it is to become set. We must be willing to establish goals whether we are sixty, seventy, fifty, or fifteen. Maintain a zest for life. Never should there be a time when we are unwilling to improve ourselves through meaningful change.

### Transitions and change in leadership

For many Church members it is often difficult to accept change in leadership. On ward and stake levels leadership changes are necessary and, often times, too frequent for our convenience and comfort. Some of us are inclined to resent and resist personnel changes. "Why can't they leave him in?" or "Why do we have to have her?" or "Why do they have to divide our ward?" Our vision may be limited. Seldom are changes made that do not bring needed progress to a person or a situation. How often in retrospect have we thought, "I didn't understand why that change was made in the program or why that person was given such a calling, but now I can see that it was just what was needed for the time."

During transitional times—and there are always transitional times in our Church—patience, love, and long-suffering are needed. A permanent part of our philosophy should be, "*Never allow yourself to be offended by someone who is learning his job.*"

Change in our own church assignments may be even more disturbing. Often when we express a wish to never have *that* assignment, the bishop or stake president offers us the blessings of that self-same calling. At those times it is good to remember the words of Paul when he, troubled by many ailments, said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

### Blessings of change

As a Church with lay leadership, the blessings of change come often. Very few of us feel adequate to meet those changes with our *own* talents. How grateful we can be for the strength of Jesus Christ which helps us with the changes brought by new callings and increased responsibilities.

The change from this life to a life with Him who is our Eternal Father is the ultimate goal to which meaningful change can bring us. I pray we will all seek and accept wholesome, orderly changes for the betterment of our personal lives. This I humbly ask in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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Following Elder Ashton's remarks, the Choir sang the number "O Savior Hear Me" without announcement.

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### President Marion G. Romney

We have just listened to Elder Marvin J. Ashton, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "O Savior Hear Me."

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Howard W. Hunter, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, who will be our concluding speaker.