

one who has said, "I want my life back," I exhort you to go to the tree of life, where you will find the pure love of God.

God's path is simple and straight

With an uncluttered life, you will not be so busy doing terrestrial things that you do not have time to do those things which are celestial. God's plan is a plan of simplicity. It involves being obedient to simple laws—laws that have within them an automatic blessing and happiness for obedience and an automatic punishment and unhappiness for their disobedience.

I urge you to clear away the clutter. Take your life back. Use your willpower. Learn to say no to those things that will rob you of your precious time and infringe upon your agency to choose to live in exactness to God's plan of happiness and exaltation.

Don't let the subtle influences of Satan take away any part of your life. Keep it under your own control and operated by your own agency. This life is a probationary period. It is a marvelous gift of time during which we can learn to be like our Heavenly Father

by following the teachings of His Son, Jesus Christ. The path He leads us on is not a cluttered path. It is simple and straight and lighted by the Spirit.

It is my humble prayer that by our choices we may preserve our individual agency from the subtleness of Satan and live our lives bright and clear and on the path that leads us back to the presence of our Holy Father. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

We have listened to Elder Angel Abrea, who is a native of Argentina, and to William R. Bradford, who presently presides over the work in the northern part of South America with headquarters in Quito, Ecuador. We thank these brethren.

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "Now Let Us Rejoice in the Day of Salvation." Following the singing, Elder Adney Y. Komatsu of the Seventy will address us.

The choir and congregation sang "Now Let Us Rejoice."

Elder Adney Y. Komatsu

An invitation to come back

My brothers and sisters, I would like to recall to your minds the statement of invitation made by the First Presidency in December of 1985, and I quote:

"At this Christmas season we rejoice in the blessings that come of membership and *activity* in this Church whose head is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. In deep sincerity we express our love and gratitude for our brethren and sisters everywhere.

"We are aware of some who are inactive, of others who have become

critical and are prone to find fault, and of those who have been disfellowshipped or excommunicated because of serious transgressions.

"To all such we reach out in love. We are anxious to forgive in the spirit of Him who said: 'I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men' (D&C 64:10).

"We encourage Church members to forgive those who may have wronged them. To those who have ceased *activity* and to those who have become critical, we say, 'Come back. Come

back and feast at the table of the Lord, and taste again the sweet and satisfying fruits of fellowship with the saints'” (“An Invitation to Come Back,” *Church News*, 22 Dec. 1985, p. 3; italics added).

Using activities to fellowship

While most of us in the Church may think of activities as primarily fun and games, there is a part that *activities* play in the Church that reaches far beyond this shallow perception.

For those who have experienced Church discipline, feelings of isolation and loneliness are very real. This is the case whether the discipline is informal or formal. In the case of formal excommunication, the isolation and loneliness are more than a feeling. This action results in a person's name being removed from the Church membership records and the withdrawal of the gift of the Holy Ghost given at the time of baptism and confirmation.

Most of us have experienced times of isolation and loneliness in our lives. Have you ever been in a city, airport, train station, or the like and, while surrounded by hundreds or even thousands of people, yet felt alone? Have you on occasion, when uniquely challenged in your family as a child, a teen, or even an adult, felt alone while living with your family under the same roof? Have you on other occasions felt alone and lonely even while sitting among others in a Church meeting or a school class?

The fact that people are physically nearby, regardless of the setting, does not always equate to feelings of acceptance, understanding, inclusion, and fellowship. In too many cases the reverse may be true. Feelings of acceptance and inclusion come when someone invites us into their circle of friendship and activity. Far beyond fun and games, activities represent at least one non-threatening way to accept, include,

understand, and fellowship others. Perceived in this manner, activities become another vehicle to show charity, love, kindness, forgiveness, service, and to include and not exclude. Amulek said, “If ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth)” (Alma 34:29).

Those whose formal Church participation may be limited for a season can experience the warmth of loving arms and open hearts as they are invited to participate in activities in the Church. Their season of limitation is softened as they are warmly included in family home evenings, dinners, socials, firesides, roadshows, dramas, interest groups, homemaking activities, family outings, ward camps, reunions, and the like.

Through activities, individuals can sense a feeling of being included, wanted, and needed. Participating in Church activities provides opportunities to associate with members of the quorum, Relief Society, or ward on neutral grounds. Again, their season of limitation can be softened as they are fellowshipped and included socially in activities. Their participation in activities is often the forerunner to their participation in meetings of worship on the Sabbath, even though for a time they must participate in worship and teaching settings as spectators.

Planning activities with a purpose

Some critical issues are:

Are activities an integral part of your family, your quorum, Relief Society, or Church unit?

Are activities planned and conducted on a regular basis that include those working their way back into full fellowship and those who are less active in the fold?

Do your activities represent safe harbors of acceptance, brotherhood, and sisterhood?

Are you helping those who are struggling to recapture their faith and testimony look forward to the day when their privilege and blessings to participate fully in Church might be reinstated?

Through a variety of family, priesthood, Relief Society, or ward and stake activities, we can create a setting that—

1. Helps all of us participate in wholesome activities that are free from the sensuality and coarseness of many activities offered and promoted by the world.

2. Places a premium on including rather than excluding individuals and groups regardless of age, station in life, Church callings, and so on.

3. Offers opportunities for participation to the active, those who are less active, and those who are winning their way back to full fellowship.

4. Displays forgiveness and forgetting as individuals feel the warmth and concern of loving arms and open hearts. When we do not forgive and forget, the Lord warns:

“My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; . . . for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened.

“Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin” (D&C 64:8–9).

When a person returns to full fellowship in the Church as a result of love, kindness, and forgiveness from those who care, the feeling of joy is almost inexpressible. This depth of joy is described in the Book of Mormon when Alma met Ammon in a joyful meeting:

“Now the joy of Ammon was so great even that he was full; yea, he was swallowed up in the joy of his God,

even to the exhausting of his strength; and he fell again to the earth.

“Now was not this exceeding joy? Behold, this is joy which none receiveth save it be the truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness” (Alma 27:17–18).

Activities can be so much more than fun and games and so much more than momentary pleasure. Activities planned with purpose and carried out with real efforts aimed at helping participants on their path to perfection bring joy everlasting and occupy an important place in the Church.

We need to be reminded that activities sponsored by the Church are not new. In each administration of the thirteen modern-day prophets who have presided over the Church, activities have been an important part of the Latter-day Saint way of life. Church activities continue to be one means to include rather than exclude, to be a participant rather than a spectator, to find moments of joy among challenges of adversity, to promote socialization and unity rather than isolation and disharmony, and to offer neutral and nonjudgmental circumstances for those who are winning their way back to full fellowship in the Church with the Saints and household of God.

Come unto Christ

In closing I would like to continue quoting from the First Presidency's Christmas message:

“We are confident that many have longed to return, but have felt awkward about doing so. We assure you that you will find open arms to receive you and willing hands to assist you.

“This is the Christmas season when we honor the birth of the Lord who gave His life for the sins of all. We know there are many who carry heavy burdens of guilt and bitterness. To such we say, ‘Set them aside and give

heed to the words of the Savior: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . . For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30) ("An Invitation to Come Back," p. 3).

The First Presidency continues by saying:

"We plead with you. We pray for you. We invite and welcome you with love and appreciation.

"Sincerely your brethren, The First Presidency" (p. 3).

May I invite all to come unto Christ. Come back and partake of His joy. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder Adney Y. Komatsu of the Seventy has just addressed us.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Richard G. Scott of the Council of the Twelve, and he will be followed by Elder Dallin H. Oaks, also of the Council of the Twelve.

Elder Richard G. Scott

The tragic scars of abuse

I speak from the depths of my heart to each one of you who have been scarred by the ugly sin of abuse, whether you are a member or non-member of the Church. I would prefer a private setting to discuss this sensitive subject and ask that the Holy Spirit help us both that you may receive the relief of the Lord from the cruelty that has scarred your life.

Unless healed by the Lord, mental, physical, or sexual abuse can cause you serious, enduring consequences. As a victim you have experienced some of them. They include fear, depression, guilt, self-hatred, destruction of self-esteem, and alienation from normal human relationships. When aggravated by continued abuse, powerful emotions of rebellion, anger, and hatred are generated. These feelings often are focused against oneself, others, life itself, and even Heavenly Father. Frustrated efforts to fight back can degenerate into drug abuse, immorality, abandonment of home, and, tragically in extreme cases, suicide. Unless corrected, these feelings lead to despondent lives, discordant marriages, and even the transition from victim to abuser. One awful result is a deepening lack of trust in others, which becomes a barrier to healing.

Scars need not be permanent

To be helped, you must understand some things about eternal law. Your abuse results from another's unrighteous attack on your freedom. Since all of Father in Heaven's children enjoy agency, there can be some who choose willfully to violate the commandments and harm you. Such acts temporarily restrict your freedom. In justice, and to compensate, the Lord has provided a way for you to overcome the destructive results of others' acts against your will. That relief comes by applying eternal truths with priesthood assistance.

Know that the wicked choice of others cannot completely destroy your agency unless you permit it. Their acts may cause pain, anguish, even physical harm, but they cannot destroy your eternal possibilities in this brief but crucial life on earth. You must understand that *you are free to determine to overcome the harmful results of abuse*. Your attitude can control the change for good in your life. It allows you to have the help the Lord intends you to receive. No one can take away your ultimate opportunities when you understand and live eternal law. The laws of your Heavenly Father and the