

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

atonement of the Lord have made it possible that you will not be robbed of the opportunities which come to the children of God.

You may feel threatened by one who is in a position of power or control over you. You may feel trapped and see no escape. Please believe that *your Heavenly Father does not want you to be held captive by unrighteous influence, by threats of reprisal, or by fear of repercussion to the family member who abuses you.* Trust that the Lord will lead you to a solution. Ask in faith, nothing doubting (see James 1:6; Enos 1:15; Moroni 7:26; D&C 8:10; 18:18).

*I solemnly testify that when another's acts of violence, perversion, or incest hurt you terribly, against your will, you are not responsible and you must not feel guilty.* You may be left scarred by abuse, but those scars need not be permanent. In the eternal plan, in the Lord's timetable, those injuries can be made right as you do your part. Here is what you can do *now*.

### Seek help

If you are now or have in the past been abused, seek help now. Perhaps you distrust others and feel that there is no reliable help anywhere. Begin with your Eternal Father and his beloved Son, your Savior. Strive to comprehend their commandments and follow them. They will lead you to others who will strengthen and encourage you. There is available to you a priesthood leader, normally a bishop, at times a member of the stake presidency. He can build a bridge to greater understanding and healing. Joseph Smith taught, "A man can do nothing for himself unless God direct him in the right way; and the Priesthood is for that purpose" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 364).

Talk to your bishop in confidence. His calling allows him to act as an instrument of the Lord in your behalf. He can provide a doctrinal foundation to guide you to recovery. An understanding and application of eternal law will provide the healing you require. He has the right to be inspired of the Lord in your behalf. He can use the priesthood to bless you.

Your bishop can help you identify trustworthy friends to support you. He will help you regain self-confidence and self-esteem to begin the process of renewal. When abuse is extreme, he can help you identify appropriate protection and professional treatment consistent with the teachings of the Savior.

### Principles of healing

These are some of the principles of healing you will come to understand more fully:

Recognize that you are a beloved child of your Heavenly Father. He loves you perfectly and can help you as no earthly parent, spouse, or devoted friend can. His Son gave his life so that by faith in him and obedience to his teachings you can be made whole. He is the consummate healer.

Gain trust in the love and compassion of your elder brother, Jesus Christ, by pondering the scriptures. As with the Nephites, he tells you: "I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy. . . . I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you" (3 Nephi 17:7-8).

Healing best begins with your sincere prayer asking your Father in Heaven for help. That use of your agency allows divine intervention. When you permit it, the love of the Savior will soften your heart and break the cycle of abuse that can transform a victim into an aggressor. Adversity, even when caused willfully by others'

unrestrained appetite, can be a source of growth when viewed from the perspective of eternal principle (see D&C 122:7).

The victim must do all in his or her power to stop the abuse. Most often the victim is innocent because of being disabled by fear or the power or authority of the offender. At some point in time, however, the Lord may prompt a victim to recognize a degree of responsibility for abuse. Your priesthood leader will help assess your responsibility so that, if needed, it can be addressed. Otherwise the seeds of guilt will remain and sprout into bitter fruit. Yet no matter what degree of responsibility, from absolutely none to increasing consent, the healing power of the atonement of Jesus Christ can provide a complete cure (see D&C 138:1-4). Forgiveness can be obtained for all involved in abuse (see Articles of Faith 1:3). Then comes a restoration of self-respect, self-worth, and a renewal of life.

As a victim, do not waste effort in revenge or retribution against your aggressor. Focus on your responsibility to do what is in your power to correct. Leave the handling of the offender to civil and Church authorities. Whatever they do, eventually the guilty will face the Perfect Judge. Ultimately the unrepentant abuser will be punished by a just God. The purveyors of filth and harmful substances who knowingly incite others to acts of violence and depravation and those who promote a climate of permissiveness and corruption will be sentenced. Predators who victimize the innocent and justify their own corrupted life by enticing others to adopt their depraved ways will be held accountable. Of such the Master warned,

“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that

he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

Understand that healing can take considerable time. Recovery generally comes in steps. It is accelerated when gratitude is expressed to the Lord for every degree of improvement noted.

### **Forgiveness helps heal**

During prolonged recovery from massive surgery, a patient anticipates complete healing in patience, trusting in others' care. He does not always understand the importance of the treatment prescribed, but his obedience speeds recovery. So it is with you struggling to heal the scars of abuse. Forgiveness, for example, can be hard to understand, even more difficult to give. *Begin by withholding judgment.* You don't know what abusers may have suffered as victims when innocent. The way to repentance must be kept open for them. Leave the handling of aggressors to others. As you experience an easing of your own pain, full forgiveness will come more easily.

You cannot erase what has been done, but you can forgive (see D&C 64:10). Forgiveness heals terrible, tragic wounds, for it allows the love of God to purge your heart and mind of the poison of hate. It cleanses your consciousness of the desire for revenge. It makes place for the purifying, healing, restoring love of the Lord.

The Master counseled, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them *who despitefully use you and persecute you*” (3 Nephi 12:44; italics added).

Bitterness and hatred are harmful. They produce much that is destructive. They postpone the relief and healing you yearn for. Through rationalization and self-pity, they can transform a victim into an abuser. Let God be the judge—you cannot do it as well as he can.

To be counseled to just forget abuse is not helpful. You need to understand the principles which will bring healing. I repeat, most often that comes through an understanding priesthood leader who has inspiration and the power of the priesthood to bless you.

### **Cautions in repairing damage**

I caution you not to participate in two improper therapeutic practices that may cause you more harm than good. They are (1) excessive probing into every minute detail of your past experiences, particularly when this involves penetrating dialogue in group discussion; and (2) blaming the abuser for every difficulty in your life.

While some discovery is vital to the healing process, the almost morbid probing into details of past acts, long buried and mercifully forgotten, can be shattering. There is no need to pick at healing wounds to open them and cause them to fester. The Lord and his teachings can help you without destroying self-respect.

There is another danger. Detailed leading questions that probe your past may unwittingly trigger thoughts that are more imagination or fantasy than reality. They could lead to condemnation of another for acts that were not committed. I know of cases, likely few in number, where such therapy has caused great injustice to the innocent from unwittingly stimulated accusations that were later proven false. Memory, particularly adult memory of childhood experiences, is fallible. Remember, false accusation is also a sin.

Stated more simply, if someone intentionally poured a bucket of filth on your carpet, would you invite the neighbors to determine each ingredient that contributed to the ugly stain? Of course not. With the help of an expert, you would privately restore its cleanliness.

Likewise the repair of damage inflicted by abuse should be done privately, confidentially, with a trusted priesthood leader and, where needed, the qualified professional he recommends. There must be sufficient discussion of the general nature of abuse to allow you to be given appropriate counsel and to prevent the aggressor from committing more violence. Then, with the help of the Lord, you can bury the past.

I humbly testify that what I have told you is true. It is based upon eternal principles I have seen the Lord use to give a fulness of life to those scarred by wicked abuse.

### **The Savior's healing power**

If you feel there is only a thin thread of hope, believe me, it is not a thread. It can be the unbreakable connecting link to the Lord which puts a life preserver around you. He will heal you as you cease to fear and place your trust in him by striving to live his teachings.

Please, don't suffer more. Ask now for the Lord to help you (see Mormon 9:27; Moroni 7:26, 33). Decide now to talk to your bishop. Don't view all that you experience in life through lenses darkened by the scars of abuse. There is so much in life that is beautiful. Open the windows of your heart and let the love of the Savior in. And should ugly thoughts of past abuse come back, remember his love and his healing power. Your depression will be converted to peace and assurance. You will close an ugly chapter and open volumes of happiness.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **President Hinckley**

Thank you, Brother Richard Scott of the Council of the Twelve.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Council of the Twelve will be our concluding speaker for this session.