

NOTES

1. D&C 25:10.
2. *Deposition of a Disciple* (1976), 35.
3. Thought penned by Rosemary Nelson.
4. "Ancestral Home," in Donna Smith Packer, *On Footings from the Past* (1988), 402.
5. Used with permission.
6. Quoted in Mary Ellen Smoot and Marilyn Sheriff, *The City In-Between: History of Centerville, Utah* (1975), 379.
7. In Conference Report, Apr. 1982, 56; or *Ensign*, May 1982, 37.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

President Hinckley as an example of "spiritual capacity"

Those invited by the First Presidency to speak at general conference are not assigned subjects. Speakers pray for inspiration and prepare according to promptings they receive. I have been impressed to speak on "spiritual capacity."

A verse of scripture opens a door of opportunity for each of us: "There is a spirit in man," said Job, "and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding."¹ To take advantage of such an opportunity, we need more than a verbal incentive. We need an example—someone to show us how spiritual capacity can be developed. I have selected as a model for my message President Gordon B. Hinckley.² I hope he will pardon me. My motive in doing so is not one of adulation, but of emulation. We can draw upon his example in order to improve our own spiritual attributes.

This year, Sister Nelson and I have had the privilege of accompanying President and Sister Hinckley to 11 countries³ for which I have had some responsibilities. That has given us a rare opportunity to observe him closely under a variety of conditions. His teachings are always inspiring and relevant. They should be studied carefully and applied individually. They represent the word of the Lord for His people.⁴

But my purpose is not to review the content of President Hinckley's messages. Instead, I would like to focus upon

his spiritual capacities. He has developed many, including "faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, [and] diligence."⁵

His humility, for example, is so sincere that he would have me point only to the Lord Jesus Christ as our great exemplar.⁶ Of course, He is! The Master said, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done."⁷ We must never lose sight of the Savior's enduring standard as the ultimate for each of us.

But we can also learn much from a man who has spent his entire lifetime in striving to be more like the Lord. More than 87 years ago, Gordon B. Hinckley was an infant cradled in the arms of his loving parents. That newborn babe looked much as any other, I presume. An infant's body is tiny, and its spiritual capacities are undeveloped. While the body may reach the peak of its maturation in a few years, the development of the spirit may never reach the limit of its capacity, because there is no end to progression.

President Hinckley's personality, manner, and native intelligence have always been uniquely his. To these inborn attributes, however, he has added spiritual capacities, and they are continuing to increase.

Education and a mission

Both his parents and he understood the importance of education and a mission. After his graduation from the uni-

versity, he faced a major decision in 1933, when he was called to go on a mission. At that time, most young men in the Church were not able to serve because of a global economic depression that deprived nearly everyone of available cash. Earlier, his wonderful mother, with foresight and faith, had established a small savings account for his mission. Though she died before his call, her fund sent him on his way.

Shortly after Elder Hinckley's labors began in England, he became discouraged and wrote to his father. After reading that letter, his father's wise reply closed with these words: "Forget yourself and go to work."⁸ Thanks to noble parents and a crucial decision to remain, Elder Hinckley completed his mission with honor. Now he often states that the good things that have happened to him since have all hinged upon that decision to stay. On his mission, he developed good habits of study, work, communication, budgeting, time management, and more. There he learned that nothing is too hard for the Lord.⁹

The power of prayer

Long ago, President Hinckley harnessed the power of prayer. I have watched him pray over many weighty matters and receive inspired answers. Prayer invites those ennobling attributes of the spirit that are ultimately "bestowed upon all who are true followers of . . . Jesus Christ."¹⁰

Building love at home

Hobbies can aid in spiritual development. Worthy music, dance, art, and writing are among the creative activities that can enrich the soul. A good hobby can dispel heartache and give zest to life.¹¹ Through the years, one of President Hinckley's hobbies has been his home. As a young father, he learned how to build. He acquired the skills nec-

essary to remodel a house and make needed repairs. And more important, he has built and maintained the trust of his wife and their children. Together they have established—and are still adding to—wonderful memories with their children and grandchildren, who know that they are part of "a chosen generation . . . called . . . out of darkness into [the] marvellous light"¹² of the Lord. From the Hinckleys' parental example, we can learn a great lesson. Love at home comes when companions cultivate their commitment to keep the commandments of God.

Love of learning

President Hinckley's love of learning is catalyzed by curiosity. He grasps every opportunity to learn from others. On one occasion, I heard him quiz a local security officer for nearly an hour regarding crime control in a major city. I have heard him converse with building contractors, reporters, and those who specialize in the arts, architecture, business, government, law, medicine, and other disciplines. He knows their vocabularies, their challenges, and their strengths.

His remarkable ability as a writer has been gained by his living close to the Spirit. Similar skills can come to others too, for scriptures state that such has been "given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration."¹³

Remarkable sense of humor

Through the years, President Hinckley has developed a remarkable sense of humor. You have heard his quip that "Sister Hinckley and I are learning that the so-called golden years are laced with lead."¹⁴ I might add a pun, President. We are grateful to be led by that kind of lead. It gives ballast to balance one who might lean too far in any direction. And it gives stability to character.

Perseverance in spite of adversity

While I focus upon President Hinckley, Sister Hinckley should also be included. They have been married for 60 years and have long been one in spirit, while maintaining their individuality. They do not waste time pondering the past or fretting about the future. And they persevere in spite of adversity.

While going from a chapel to an airport in Central America, their vehicle was involved in an accident. Sister Nelson and I were traveling behind them and saw it occur. A truck loaded on top with unsecured metal rods approached them at an intersection. To avoid a collision, its driver suddenly stopped the truck, launching those iron rods like javelins to pierce the Hinckleys' car. Windows were smashed; fenders and doors were dented. The accident could have been very serious. While shattered glass was being removed from their clothing and skin, President Hinckley said, "Thank the Lord for His blessing; now let's continue on in another car."

Compassion and sympathy

Among President Hinckley's spiritual attributes is that of compassion. He is sympathetic to people and feels a strong urge to help them. I have watched him weep with those who mourn and rejoice when Saints are blessed. Such compassion can come to anyone whose heart has truly been touched by the Spirit of the Lord.

President and Sister Hinckley have demonstrated that the capacity to understand increases as one learns and then teaches with diligence.¹⁵ Unless illness interferes, age does not diminish—it augments—the capacity for spiritual development.

An unprecedented pace

Each President of the Church, armed with the Holy Ghost as a constant

companion, inherits an enormous workload at an age when most men would be retired. President Hinckley sets a pace that is unprecedented. In 1996, he visited missionaries, members, and friends of the Church in 23 nations on four continents. During that year, he gave more than 200 major discourses. His stride in 1997 continues to follow that same pattern. His strenuous schedule is driven by his determination to be "anxiously engaged"¹⁶ in building the kingdom of God. Often I have heard him say, "I don't know how to get anything done except getting on my knees and pleading for help and then getting on my feet and going to work." Unshakable faith, hard work, and contagious optimism epitomize our prophet.

I have watched President Hinckley, in speaking before great congregations, depend upon the Holy Ghost, who serves "to enlighten and ennoble the mind, to purify and sanctify the soul, to incite to good works, and to reveal the things of God."¹⁷

President Hinckley has achieved spiritual supremacy over physical feelings. Even when entitled to normal complaints of "jet lag" or "burnout," he is attentive. I believe that his personal antidote for fatigue is enthusiasm¹⁸ for the work. He is energized by the Lord, who said, "I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind . . . [and] fill your soul with joy."¹⁹

Inspired decisions

One of our most memorable experiences occurred when we visited the temple construction site in Guayaquil, Ecuador. There President Hinckley recounted to us how that property was selected. On a prior visit, he had been shown several possible locations, but none seemed to satisfy him. While prayerfully searching, he asked about ground on a hill not far from the airport. But it was said to be *not* for sale. Presi-

dent Hinckley directed that they visit that property anyway. There he received inspiration from the Almighty that this was the right place for the temple. Now we were privileged to stand on that spot reserved by the Lord and then procured for this sacred purpose. Our joy was indescribable.

The prophet makes major decisions on a daily basis. This he does with great capacity. Meanwhile, he encourages each of us to make choices that will "give us growth and joy in this life and eternal life in the world to come."²⁰

Enriched with enthusiasm and enlightened by the Almighty

This President of the Church calls many people to serve, knowing that much is required of them. He is keenly aware of their opportunities and risks. "Yes, this work requires sacrifice," he said. "It requires effort, it means courage to speak out and faith to try. . . . It needs men and women of solemn purpose."²¹ "We know that there are some limits on what you can do, but we know also that there need be no limits on enthusiasm, planning, thoughtful consideration, and effort."²²

Brothers and sisters, the spirit that dwells within each of us can be enriched with enthusiasm and enlightened by the Almighty. The process of spiritual growth is revealed in the scriptures: "Intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; . . . [and] light cleaveth unto light."²³ "That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day."²⁴

Prophets speak the will of the Lord

Gratefully, we follow prophets who have been given a divine commission:

"Whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation."²⁵

While we follow prophetic teachings, we can develop our spiritual capacities by emulating one such as President Gordon B. Hinckley. I thank God for this prophet. He is the Lord's anointed. Willingly I follow him. I love him and sustain him. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Job 32:8. The word *spirit* in this verse was translated from the Hebrew noun *ruwach*, which means "wind, air, breath, mind, or spirit." The Greek noun for spirit is *pneuma*. It is the root from which English words such as *pneumatic tires* and *pneumonia* are derived. *Pneuma* also means "air, breath, mind, or spirit." It is used 385 times in the Greek New Testament.
2. Twenty-four years ago, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley was impressed to speak of his experiences accompanying President Harold B. Lee to nations abroad (see Conference Report, Oct. 1973, 164–65; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 124–25).
3. United States of America, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Uruguay, Paraguay, Ecuador, and Venezuela.
4. See Amos 3:7; D&C 68:4.
5. D&C 4:6.
6. Among the many scriptural commandments, see 3 Nephi 27:27; Mormon 7:10.
7. John 13:15. If we love Him, we will keep His commandments (see Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 5:10; John 14:15; D&C 124:87).
8. See Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1996), 64.

9. See Jeremiah 32:17; Luke 1:37.
10. Moroni 7:48.
11. See Richard G. Scott, in Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 34; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 25–26.
12. 1 Peter 2:9.
13. Moses 6:5; see also Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 6:5.
14. In Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 93; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 70.
15. See D&C 88:78.
16. D&C 58:27.
17. James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (1968), 167; see also D&C 121:26.
18. The word *enthusiasm* comes from Greek roots *en*, meaning “in,” and *theos*, meaning “God”—“God within us.”
19. D&C 11:13; see also D&C 124:88.
20. Gordon B. Hinckley, “*Caesar, Circus, or Christ?*” Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (26 Oct. 1965), 8.
21. Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Oct. 1969, 115.
22. Bonneville International Corporation Management Seminar, 23 Feb. 1992.
23. D&C 88:40.
24. D&C 50:24.
25. D&C 68:4.

The chorus sang “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.”

President Hinckley

Sister Mary Ellen Smoot of the Relief Society has spoken to us, followed by Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The Mormon Youth Chorus then sang “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.”

President Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our concluding speaker.

President Thomas S. Monson

The birth and childhood of the Savior

In Salt Lake City, a touch of autumn is in the air. Daylight hours grow fewer and the weather turns cooler, reminding one and all that winter is just around the corner. The Christmas season will soon be upon us.

Inevitably, the spirit of Christmas inspires kind deeds, touches human hearts, and prompts one’s mind to reach back to that humble stable in faraway Bethlehem, to a time when the prophecies of the prophets, both in that area and here on the American continent, became a living reality. Christ the Lord was born.

Precious little is written concerning the childhood of Jesus. One might suppose that His birth was so revolutionary in its magnitude as to dominate accounts of His boyhood. We marvel at the ma-

ture wisdom of the boy who, leaving Joseph and Mary, was found in the temple, “sitting in the midst of the doctors,”¹ teaching them the gospel. When Mary and Joseph expressed their concern about His absence, He asked of them the penetrating question: “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”²

The sacred record declares of Him: “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”³ An obscure passage describes the transition from child to man: He “went about doing good.”⁴

Because of Jesus Christ the world has changed—the divine Atonement has been made, the price of sin has been paid, and the fearful spectacle of death yields to the light of truth and the assurance of resurrection. Though the years roll by, His birth, His ministry, His legacy