

Heed the words of the living prophet

I invite you again to “come, listen to a prophet’s voice.” The Prophet Joseph Smith established Relief Society as a result of a revelation from God, so that “knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time henceforth.” Joseph Smith promised, “You will receive instructions through the order of the Priesthood which God has established, through the medium of those appointed to lead, guide and direct the affairs of the Church in this last dispensation.”⁹

In Relief Society we are taught ways to protect and strengthen the family.

President Hinckley has said: “The best lies ahead. . . . If you will stay on the straight and narrow, the best lies ahead. It is a wonderful time to be alive. It’s a great time to be a member of this Church when you can hold your head up without embarrassment and with some pride in this great latter-day work.”¹⁰

“Come, listen to a prophet’s voice,” that you may know the will of God, that you may have His light to direct your

path. It is my prayer that you may also have a personal witness, as I have, that our living prophet today, President Gordon B. Hinckley, has soul-saving instructions for you and yours—instructions that, if followed, will lead us all back to our heavenly home, safe and unspotted from the world. I say these things in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1951, 157.
2. “The Keys of the Kingdom,” *Millennial Star*, 2 Sept. 1889, 548.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 21:4–5.
4. *Hymns*, no. 21.
5. Arch L. Madsen, quoted in “Memories of a Prophet,” *Improvement Era*, Feb. 1970, 72.
6. Cala Byram, “President Hinckley, 87, Charms World As He Leads Church,” *Deseret News*, 23 May 1998, p. A1.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 109:73.
8. See *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
9. *History of the Church*, 4:607.
10. “Messages of Inspiration from President Hinckley,” *Church News*, 2 Sept. 1995, 2.

Elder Robert D. Hales

The healing process of the soul

Since we assembled in general conference last April, as many of you know, I experienced my third heart attack, which necessitated bypass surgery. Because of skilled doctors; a caring and well-trained medical staff; my wife, Mary, who is my patient, loving, and constant caregiver; and the prayers offered by so many in my behalf, I have been blessed with renewed health and strength. Thank you for your concern and for your prayers.

My message today is how to aid the healing process of the soul. It is a message to lead you and me to the Great Healer, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a plan to read the scriptures, pray,

ponder, repent if necessary, and be healed with the peace and joy of His Spirit. May I share my ponderings as I went through the healing process.

Pondering is important for healing

While I was lying in my hospital bed and for several weeks at home, my physical activity was severely restricted by intense pain which disabled my weakened body, but I learned the joy of freeing my mind to ponder the meaning of life and the eternities. Since my calendar was wiped clean of meetings, tasks, and appointments, for a number of weeks I was able to turn my attention away from matters of administration to matters of

the eternities. The Lord has told us, "Let the solemnities of eternity rest upon your minds" (D&C 43:34). I discovered that if I dwelled only upon my pain, it inhibited the healing process. I found that pondering was a very important element in the healing process for both soul and body. Pain brings you to a humility that allows you to ponder. It is an experience I am grateful to have endured.

I pondered deeply the purpose of pain and studied in my mind what I could learn from my experience and began to comprehend pain a little better. I learned that the physical pain and the healing of the body after major surgery are remarkably similar to the spiritual pain and the healing of the soul in the process of repentance. "Therefore, care not for the body, neither the life of the body; but care for the soul, and for the life of the soul" (D&C 101:37).

Exercise faith, study, and pray

I have come to understand how useless it is to dwell on the *whys*, *what ifs*, and *if onlys* for which there likely will be given no answers in mortality. To receive the Lord's comfort, we must exercise faith. The questions *Why me? Why our family? Why now?* are usually unanswerable questions. These questions detract from our spirituality and can destroy our faith. We need to spend our time and energy building our faith by turning to the Lord and asking for strength to overcome the pains and trials of this world and to endure to the end for greater understanding.

In Proverbs we are told to "ponder the path of life" (Proverbs 5:6). As we ponder the path of life, we can set our path to righteousness and feel the Spirit direct us. "Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do" (2 Nephi 32:3).

If you and I are to feast upon the words of Christ, we must study the scrip-

tures and absorb His words through pondering them and making them a part of every thought and action.

Just as studying the words of Christ is an element of pondering, so too are diligent, faithful prayer and listening to the Spirit. In a revelation given through Joseph Smith, the Lord has told us:

"I say unto you, my friends, I leave these sayings with you to ponder in your hearts, with this commandment which I give unto you, that ye shall call upon me while I am near—

"Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (D&C 88:62-63).

Pondering brings gratitude and peace

Pondering takes our thoughts from the trivial things of this world and brings us closer to the gentle, guiding hand of our Maker as we heed the "still small voice" of the Holy Ghost (see 1 Kings 19:12; 1 Nephi 17:45; D&C 85:6). In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord spoke to David Whitmer: "Your mind has been on the things of the earth more than on the things of . . . your Maker, . . . and you have not given heed unto my Spirit" (D&C 30:2).

Pondering the things of the Lord—His word, His teachings, His commandments, His life, His love, the gifts He has given us, His Atonement for us—brings about a tremendous feeling of gratitude for our Savior and for the life and blessings He has given us.

Recent months have brought some tender experiences with families going through all the pain inherent in the peaceful passing of a family member. As the one passing away prepares to depart mortality, the family members experience a peace and willingness to let go of their loved one. The family members feel the pain of separation but are comforted by the peace that comes from

priesthood blessings, family prayers, and the knowledge of the Resurrection that assures them they will be reunited with their loved one in the not-too-distant future. Their faith and putting their trust in the Lord help them put the *whys* and *ifs* behind them and feel the comfort of the Spirit of the Lord.

Repentance brings spiritual healing

Our Savior knows the heart of each of us. He knows the pains of our hearts. If we seek the truth, develop faith in Him, and, if necessary, sincerely repent, we will receive a spiritual change of heart which only comes from our Savior. Our hearts will become new again.

Repentance includes recognizing that we have done wrong and need to repent, confessing our sins to the proper priesthood authority, restoring whatever can be restored, and resolving to obey the Lord. Repentance brings about spiritual healing of the soul. In an address to his people, King Benjamin said:

“Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever” (Mosiah 2:38).

The Savior's pain

As I endured physical pain, I thought also of the deeper pain and anguish of the soul. I thought of the pain experienced by our Savior, Jesus Christ—not only the acute and excruciating physical pain as He was lifted upon the cross, but also the chronic, agonizing, anguishing pain caused by the disobedience of mankind.

King Benjamin prophesied about the Savior:

“And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people” (Mosiah 3:7).

The greater and more intense suffering of the Lord was not physical—not the trial or the mocking, not the beating or being spat upon. It was not even being betrayed by a beloved associate or rejected by those whom He loved. Nor was it the physical act of crucifixion. Although all of these things happened and each action was very painful, the Savior's greatest pain during the Atonement was endured to help the transgressor to be healed:

“For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

“But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

“Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit” (D&C 19:16–18).

Alma the Younger's pain and joy

It is interesting to note that, other than in the book of Job and a few other places, there are very few scriptural references to physical or mortal pain. The pain most frequently spoken of in the scriptures is the pain and anguish of the Lord and His prophets for the disobedient souls.

Alma the Younger provides a vivid example in the account of his conversion. Alma had been rebellious, even so much that he and the sons of Mosiah went about “seeking to destroy the church of God” (Alma 36:6). Imagine the pain and heartache of Alma's parents and, more importantly, of Heavenly Father and Jesus, who finally sent an angel to tell him,

"If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God" (Alma 36:9). It was painful enough that Alma should choose disobedience, but he was also causing others to rebel against the word of God.

Alma described his feelings when he saw and heard the angel. He said that as he remembered his rebellion and all of his sins and iniquities, he "was tormented with the pains of hell" (Alma 36:13). Alma's pain went beyond physical pain. He "was racked with eternal torment" (Alma 36:12) because of his disobedience and rebellion against God.

After recognizing the seriousness of his sins and then turning to God, he said: "There could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. . . . On the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy" (Alma 36:21).

His joy came because of his contrite repentance. From that time forth, Alma and all those who were with him, including the sons of Mosiah, went about trying "to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church, confessing all their sins" (Mosiah 27:35) and bringing souls unto Christ.

Only by repentance and asking for forgiveness of the Lord was Alma able to put his pain behind him and receive of the joy and light of the gospel. The Lord taught the Nephites that knowledge of the truth, diligent faith, and true repentance bring about a change of heart. Alma experienced a mighty change of heart.

Understanding the pains of mortality

In this mortal life, each of us is going to experience pain in one form or another. Pain may come from an accident or from a painful medical condition. We may feel deep pain from the mourning that appropriately comes with the loss of a loved one or the loss of affection from

one we hold dear. Pain may come from feeling lonely or depressed. It often comes as a result of our disobedience to the commandments of God, but it also comes to those who are doing all they can to keep their lives in line with the example of the Savior.

The scriptures teach that "there is . . . opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11). Just as times of joy and happiness come to each of us, so also comes pain to every mortal. How can we understand those moments in our life when we experience physical or emotional pain?

Elder Spencer W. Kimball said: "We knew before we were born that we were coming to the earth for bodies and experience and that we would have joys and sorrows, ease and pain, comforts and hardships, health and sickness, successes and disappointments, and we knew also that . . . we would die. We accepted all these eventualities with a glad heart, eager to accept both the favorable and unfavorable. . . . We were willing to come and take life as it came" (*Faith Precedes the Miracle* [1972], 106).

Elder Orson F. Whitney wrote: "No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire" (quoted in *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, 98).

The Lord is the ultimate caregiver

When we are experiencing pain, the caregiver is a very important part of the recovery process. Attentive doctors,

nurses, therapists, a loving spouse, parents, children, and friends comfort us when we are ill and speed our recovery process. There are times when, no matter how independent we may be, we must entrust others with our care. We must surrender ourselves to them. Our caregivers are those who assist in the healing process.

The Lord is the ultimate caregiver. We must surrender ourselves to the Lord. In doing so, we give up whatever is causing our pain and turn everything over to Him. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee" (Psalm 55:22). "And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son" (Alma 33:23). Through faith and trust in the Lord and obedience to His counsel, we make ourselves eligible to be partakers of the Atonement of Jesus Christ so that one day we may return to live with Him.

As we put our faith and trust in the Lord, we must battle our pain day by day and sometimes hour by hour, even moment by moment; but in the end, we understand that marvelous counsel given to the Prophet Joseph Smith as he struggled with his pain of feeling forgotten and isolated in Liberty Jail:

"My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;

"And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes" (D&C 121:7-8).

Draw near to the Savior

My dear brothers and sisters, when pain, tests, and trials come in life, draw near to the Savior. "Wait upon the Lord, . . . look for him" (Isaiah 8:17; 2 Nephi 18:17). "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall

run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31). Healing comes in the Lord's time and the Lord's way; be patient.

Our Savior waits for us to come to Him through our scripture study, pondering, and prayer to our Heavenly Father. Great blessings and lessons come from overcoming adversity. As we are strengthened and healed, we can then lift and strengthen others with our faith. May we be instruments in the Lord's hands in blessing the lives of those in pain.

I give you my testimony that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ and that He waits for us to come to Him to give us counsel and compassionate caring. May the Lord's blessings be upon each of us as we deal with the trials of life for us personally and for our loved ones, I so pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "Beautiful Savior" and "Jesus, Lover of My Soul."

President Hinckley

Sister Virginia U. Jensen, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, has spoken to us, followed by Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve. The choir then sang those beautiful hymns "Beautiful Savior" and "Jesus, Lover of My Soul."

We are grateful to the Bonneville International LDS Radio Network and the owners and operators of the many other television and radio stations and cable systems for offering their facilities as a public service to bring the proceedings of this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world.

We express our appreciation to the Mormon Youth Chorus for the beautiful music they have provided this morning.