

Be Thou Humble

By Elder Steven E. Snow
Of the Seventy

Humility enables us to be better parents, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, neighbors and friends.

We are blessed in the Church to have a collection of hymns which help us worship through song. In our Church meetings, “the hymns invite the Spirit of the Lord, create a feeling of reverence, unify us as members, and provide a way for us to offer praises to the Lord. Some of the greatest sermons are preached by the singing of hymns.”¹

Just a few months after the Church was organized, a revelation was received by the Prophet Joseph Smith for his wife Emma. The Lord directed her “to make a selection of sacred hymns, as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church.”²

Emma Smith assembled a collection of hymns which first appeared in this Kirtland hymnal in 1836.³ There were only 90 songs included in this thin little booklet. Many of them were hymns from Protestant faiths. At least 26 of them were written by William W. Phelps, who later prepared and assisted in the printing of the hymnal. Only the lyrics were written; no musical notes accompanied the texts. This humble little hymnal proved to be a great blessing to early members of the Church.

The latest edition of our English-language hymnal was published in 1985. Many of the selections which Emma chose so many years earlier are still included in our hymnbook, such as “I Know That My Redeemer Lives” and “How Firm a Foundation.”⁴

One song that was new to the 1985 hymnal is “Be Thou Humble.”⁵ This tranquil hymn was written by Grietje Terburg Rowley, who passed away last year. She joined the Church in 1950 in Hawaii, where she was teaching school. Sister Rowley served on the General Music Committee and helped to adapt the hymns into multiple languages. She based her text for “Be Thou Humble” on two verses of scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 112:10 and Ether 12:27. The verse in Ether

of scripture. Doctrine and Covenants 1:2, 10 and Luke 14:27. The verse in Luke reads: "And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; ... for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them."

Like all of the Church's hymns, "Be Thou Humble" teaches pure and simple truths. It teaches us that if we humble ourselves, our prayers are answered; we enjoy peace of mind; we serve more effectively in our callings; and, if we continue to be faithful, we will ultimately return to the presence of our Heavenly Father.

The Savior taught His followers that they must humble themselves as a little child in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven.⁶ As we raise our own children, we need to help them remain humble as they mature into adulthood. We do not do this by breaking their spirit through unkindness or by being too harsh in our discipline. While nurturing their self-confidence and self-esteem, we need to teach them the qualities of selflessness, kindness, obedience, lack of pride, civility, and unpretentiousness. We need them to learn to take joy in the successes of siblings and friends. President Howard W. Hunter taught that "our genuine concern should be for the success of others."⁷ If not, our children can become obsessed with self-promotion and outdoing others, jealousy, and resentment for the triumphs of peers. I'm grateful for a mother who, when seeing I was becoming too full of myself as a boy, would say, "Son, a little bit of humility right now would go a long way."

But humility is not something reserved to be taught only to children. We must all strive to become more humble. Humility is essential to gain the blessings of the gospel. Humility enables us to have broken hearts when we sin or make mistakes and makes it possible for us to repent. Humility enables us to be better parents, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, neighbors and friends.

On the other hand, unnecessary pride can dissolve family relationships, break up marriages, and destroy friendships. It is especially important to remember humility when you feel contention rising in your home. Think of all the heartache you can avoid by humbling yourself to say, "I'm sorry"; "That was inconsiderate of me"; "What would you like to do?"; "I just wasn't thinking"; or "I'm very proud of you." If these little phrases were humbly used, there would be less contention and more peace in our homes.

Simply living life can be and often is a humbling experience. Accident and illness, the death of loved ones, problems in relationships, even financial reversals can bring us to our knees. Whether these difficult experiences come through no fault of our own or through bad decisions and poor judgment, these trials are all humbling. If we choose to be spiritually attuned and remain humble and

humbling. If we choose to be spiritually attuned and remain humble and teachable, our prayers become more earnest and faith and testimony will grow as we overcome the tribulations of mortal existence. All of us look forward to exaltation, but before this can occur, we must persevere through what has been referred to as the “valley of humility.”⁸

Many years ago, our 15-year-old son Eric suffered a serious head injury. Seeing him in a coma for over a week broke our hearts. The doctors told us they were uncertain about what would happen next. Obviously, we were thrilled when he began to regain consciousness. We thought now everything was going to be fine, but we were mistaken.

When he awoke, he could not walk or talk or feed himself. Worst of all, he had no short-term memory. He could remember most everything before the accident, but he had no ability to remember events after, even things which had happened only minutes earlier.

For a time, we worried we would have a son locked in the mind of a 15-year-old. Things had come very easily to our son before the accident. He was athletic, popular, and did very well in school. Before, his future seemed bright; now we worried he may not have much of a future, at least one he could remember. He now struggled to relearn very, very basic skills. This was a very humbling time for him. It was also a very humbling time for his parents.

Honestly, we wondered how such a thing could happen. We had always strived to do the right things. Living the gospel had been a high priority for our family. We couldn't understand how something so painful could happen to us. We were driven to our knees as it soon became apparent his rehabilitation would take months, even years. More difficult still was the gradual realization he would not be as he was before.

During this time, many tears were shed and our prayers became even more heartfelt and sincere. Through the eyes of humility, we gradually began to see the small miracles which our son experienced during this painful time. He began making gradual improvement. His attitude and outlook were very positive.

Today, our son Eric is married to a wonderful companion, and they have five beautiful children. He is a passionate educator and contributor to his community, as well as the Church. Most important, he continues to live in the same spirit of humility he gained long ago.

But what if we could be humble before we walk through that “valley of humility”? Alma taught:

“Blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble.”

“Yea, [they are] much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble.”⁹

I am grateful for prophets, like Alma, who have taught us the worth of this great attribute. Spencer W. Kimball, the 12th President of the Church, said: “How does one get humble? To me, one must constantly be reminded of his dependence. On whom dependent? On the Lord. How remind one’s self? By real, constant, worshipful, grateful prayer.”¹⁰

It should come as no surprise that President Kimball’s favorite hymn was “I Need Thee Every Hour.”¹¹ Elder Dallin H. Oaks reported that this was the most oft-sung opening hymn by the Brethren in the temple during his early years in the Quorum of the Twelve. He said, “Picture the spiritual impact of a handful of the Lord’s servants singing that song before praying for his guidance in fulfilling their mighty responsibilities.”¹²

I testify of the importance of humility in our lives. I am grateful for the individuals like Sister Grietje Rowley who have penned inspiring words and music which help us learn the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which includes humility. I am grateful we have a legacy of hymns, which helps us to worship through song, and I am grateful for humility. It is my prayer we will all strive for humility in our lives so we might become better parents, sons and daughters, and followers of the Savior. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.