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The Power of Love

Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi
I am indeed grateful for the opportunity to stand before you this day. It is an honor and privilege to do so. English is not my native tongue, so I pray that the Spirit of the Lord will guide me. I am also, as yet, a "green bean" as a "G.A." so I am still frightened to serve the Lord in this capacity. I won't try to preach to you today--I am not qualified to do so. However, I would like to share some of the most spiritual experiences that I have encountered over the last few months. I would like to relate them to our Japanese society, showing how the Japanese members are affected by the gospel.

About five months ago I had the privilege of traveling with President and Sister Kimball to attend area conferences in the Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, and also Japan for the dedication of the Tokyo Temple and area conferences in Tokyo and Osaka. This covered almost a three-week period, and so I had the privilege to become well acquainted with President and Sister Kimball. Today I would like to share an experience I had with them in the hope that it will help your work.

As we were staying at hotels as a whole group during the series of area conferences, the local members were asked to supply priesthood leaders to watch over the hallways of the hotel. We would block out one section for security purposes so that we could protect President Kimball and other general authorities and their wives. Every morning--and this is something I learned in a touching way--President Kimball would come out of his room, usually about 6:45 or 7:00 in the morning, without his tie or shoes and socks. He would come out and express his love to the security people and to the local members. He would kiss and hug and embrace them. At 86 years of age he is tireless in his service and in expressing himself to other people. He is unbelievable. He hugged and kissed them.

When we stayed at the Keio Plaza Hotel in Tokyo, President Kimball came out of his room at about 6:45 a.m. as usual, with bare feet and without a tie. He hugged a young man. This young man had completely lost his direction in life. His family situation was unstable, and he was insecure. Although he had been baptized when he was 17 years of age, he was uncertain about what he wanted from life. Just a week prior to the area conference he walked into church, and expressing himself to the branch president said, "I want to be a good member. What can I do?" The branch president told him to come to Priesthood Meeting and Sunday School. Then he told him that this week they needed to supply one young brother to assist with the night security for President Kimball and the other general authorities. So, on that particular morning, he was there when President Kimball came out. This young man, 20 years of age, couldn't stop his tears. Later he said, "In the Celestial world, is it like that? Is our Heavenly Father like that? When President Kimball kissed me and hugged me, I felt so strongly that the Spirit testified to me that our Heavenly Father is just like he is." And he said, "Oh, I was almost going to miss the glorious opportunity to stay in the Church! And I wouldn't have stopped wandering. I almost missed the total picture, the panorama, the beauty of the gospel." This young man is now saving his money to go on a mission. He felt strongly that the Spirit testified to him that he could help his parents and that he could share the gospel with them.

I want to share another beautiful story with you. Right before I left Tokyo, a young boy walked into my room. Could I just give the touching testimony of this young man?

My family consists of three members now, and we are living in our grandparents' home because my parents were divorced two years ago. Since that time, my grandfather and mother started working. Sometime in October of 1979 I met the young missionaries at Shibuya Station. I studied and was baptized within three weeks. Although I received baptism, I became totally inactive for about seven months. Since my family was not stable, I wasn't happy. I had been wondering about my life and the future, even about my life hereafter. I wandered around every day and didn't go to school because I had lost sight of my objectives. With a feeling of depression and emptiness, I walked to church one day without consciously thinking of going there. I met with the missionaries again and with the members. I attended a beautiful baptismal service which impressed me greatly; in fact I was inspired. I decided to attend church after that and learned the importance of the gospel teachings and the importance of missionary work. I was called as a branch missionary and assisted the full-time missionaries almost every day. I went to street meetings with them and contacted many, many people. The Lord helped me. Within two months I brought many people to the full-time missionaries and I, myself, taught seven people and had the privilege to baptize them.

One day as I was praying, I received a strong feeling that I should proselyte my own family. I prayed and prayed and then introduced the missionaries to my mother first. I felt that it was very important to convert my family in order for us to obtain eternal life as a family. My mother was attending another Christian church and had many friends. Because she was afraid of losing these friends, at first she refused to be baptized. However, with the help of the missionaries and through the cooperation of the members, within about a month she was baptized. The members came to her baptismal service, and it was a beautiful testimony to me that I could baptize her. Everyone at the service cried and cried because of the Spirit we felt in that room. When we went through the Tokyo Temple Open House and saw the waiting room, my mother started to cry because she felt the Spirit so strongly. I explained to her, "Mom, this is the place we have to come back to to be sealed for..."
time and all eternity." We decided at that moment, in that sacred spot, that we would come back.

My sister was baptized September 11, 1980. I performed her baptism also. I am sure that there are more wonderful Latter-day Saints who can bring their families into the Church. This I know.

Although my mother and sister joined the Church, I forgot to tell my grandparents about the gospel. I regretted this so much. This January my grandfather had a heart attack while he was on a business trip. I was very shocked. I thought that I might not be able to baptize him by my own hands. I earnestly prayed to my Heavenly Father at 10 minute intervals for a period of three or four days. I prayed so hard. I had never prayed so hard in my whole life. The doctor had given up and then the miracle happened. Eventually my grandfather's health was restored. Heavenly Father blessed him. After two months he was out of the hospital. The first part of March I called our good missionaries and asked them to come to our home, where I introduced them to my grandparents. They were so receptive. They received the discussions and believed in the gospel. Elder Kikuchi, this week after stake conference I will baptize them. Thank God from the bottom of my heart because he has blessed me so much. I am 17 years old. When I am 19 I plan to go on a mission. I will live righteously. And he went on to say, "With the help of the Lord, can I bring my father back to my home?"

As you can see, Japan is no longer the family place of stability. Every three seconds, somewhere in Japan, there is a divorce. A lot of children are suffering because of this. As far as I understand, this is second to the United States and Russia. The divorce crime is unbelievable. HOW can we save and protect our families and prevent this? I say that only the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ can heal and protect families and prevent this great crisis.

I want to share another wonderful story with you. In Japan, in the spring and the fall, we have what we call Undokai, which is a sports festival for kindergartens, elementary schools, and high schools. The mothers prepare a lunch and the families spend the day at school watching the children participate in sports events. On just such a day a Japanese sister, Sister Asada, had prepared a lunch, and she and her family went to the kindergarten sports festival. As lunchtime approached, Sister Asada began to spread her food on the table. Sitting next to her was a mother, grandmother, and three children. The mother had forgotten to prepare a lunch, and after about twenty minutes she said she must go home to get their lunch. Another twenty minutes passed and this woman had not returned, so Sister Asada offered to share the lunch she had prepared with the grandmother and the children. They refused, saying they would have their lunch soon. Well, they waited about an hour and still the mother didn't return. They found out later that the woman had forgotten to prepare a lunch and that it took her about an hour and a half to do so. In the meantime, Sister Asada again offered to share her lunch because she could tell that the children were hungry. This time they graciously accepted. From this experience the mother and Sister Asada developed a warm friendship. One day Sister Asada invited the woman to a Church fireside. At the fireside a missionary sat down next to the woman, and she asked, "What is this Gaijin doing here?" (Gaijin is what we call foreigners.) "They are missionaries of our church."

Sister Asada said, "They serve two years without receiving any money from the Church." The woman asked if she could study with them. This was a shock to Sister Asada, who quickly replied, "Of course, please do." This woman started to take the discussions from the missionaries. When she was taught the discussion on the Word of Wisdom, it was the most difficult part for her because at that time she was smoking about 5 packs of cigarettes a day and was drinking alcohol pretty heavily. When her husband found out that she was taking lessons from the Mormon missionaries he said, "You won't be able to give up your alcohol and cigarettes. I know some LDS people in our company and they are really strict about living the commandments. If you can join their church, I'll join with you." At this time this family had been having many problems. This woman was baptized, and as she bore her testimony she said, "Brothers and sisters, my family has been unhappy and our life meaningless. But because of Sister Asada's kind food offered to my family at the kindergarten sports festival, she was a life saver for my entire family." And she expressed with tears in her eyes, "You know something brothers and sisters? That food was life eternal to our family." Now her three children have been blessed and her husband is taking the discussions from the missionaries.

I am trying to show through these three stories how people are brought together by the gospel. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only solution and preventative medicine for our problems.

I would like to share another experience with you. Three weeks ago one of our mission presidents called me. "Elder Kikuchi," he said, "help me. There is a young missionary in my office who says that he wants to go home. How can I help him? I have spent three hours with him, but he says he wants his ticket and passport and wants to leave."

"I suppose you went over everything with him?" I asked. "President, could I just speak to him?" He put the missionary on the phone and I said, "Elder, I understand you want to go home."

"Yes, Elder Kikuchi, just give me my ticket. I don't want to stay here."

"Well, I understand, but I want to know the reason why you want to leave."

"Oh, I explained everything to my president."

"Well, Elder, I don't want you to stay here, but I would like to visit with you before you leave us."

"Oh, you don't need to come here. I just spent a lot of time with the president."

"Elder, I need you. I love you. The Lord is extending his hand to you to be the savior for the Japanese people. Are you refusing the Lord's invitation? Are you going to leave us alone? Could you kindly spend even ten minutes with me? I'll come up this afternoon. I'll catch the first plane. I don't want to force you to stay, but at least let me talk to you before I say it is okay for you to go."

"Oh, you are a busy man. You don't need to come up here and you don't need to spend the time with me." "Elder, I tell you, you are more important than my paperwork. You are important enough for me to come up to spend the time with
And he said, "Okay."

Before I hung up, I said, "Elder, tell me, tell me why you want to go home." And I could sense the tears.

"Elder Kikuchi, my parents got a divorce. I've lost my track."

"Did you talk to your president about it?"

"No."

And I said, "Well, would you tell him about it, and I will come up. Just wait 24 hours and then you can leave tomorrow." And then I just hung up. Within 30 minutes he called back.

"Elder Kikuchi, you don't need to come up. I felt your love. I will stay."

Another experience: A mission president from another mission at the south end of Japan called me. There was another missionary who wanted to return to America. He had been born in the western part of the United States and had grown up there. For some reason, when he was sixteen he left his home and went to another area. He met the missionaries there and was baptized. One year after his baptism, when he turned nineteen, he became a missionary. He was a stake missionary first, and he worked and saved his money so that he could serve a full-time mission. Now he wanted to go home. I told the mission president that I would come and talk to the young elder. I spent a couple of hours with this young man. He just talked and talked and talked. For two hours he talked, and I just listened while he stated all the reasons he wanted to go home. After two hours I said, "Elder, those are not your real reasons for wanting to go home. Is there something else that is wrong?" And he started to cry. He explained about his family situation and the problems his parents had. He received no mail from home. He said, "My companions get letters almost every week. I started to get lonesome, you know? I need to feel that someone loves me."

Brothers and Sisters, I think we can learn something from these stories. I, myself, have learned a great deal from these experiences.

I believe that listening--listening in the Church, in priesthood meetings, as bishops, stake presidents, counselors, parents, in your profession--I firmly believe that listening is a dimension of love. I also believe that the art of listening is an eternal quest. I believe that listening is a healing power and is the most curable medicine. I feel so strongly that we need good listening ears in the Church. I also believe that listening, you might say, is the best preventative medicine. Listening to a child, a husband, a wife, missionaries, students, patients--I think this is the most precious expression of your love and concern.

I believe it was John Raskin who once stated: "Give a little to your children and you get a great deal back." I believe this principle can be applied in the Church. Brothers and sisters, I am concerned about one thing in the Church. I think we need to listen more carefully to our people. We need to do better.

Lastly, could I just leave a few of my thoughts with you: Man's joy and sufferings are the reflection of his habitual thinking. He is the product of what he thinks all day long. His character is the total sum of his thoughts.

If you don't pray, you cannot be safe. Remember to pray.

Another thought: The beauties in life come from betterment of service to others. The divine nature of the human soul is humble service to others. Neal Maxwell said, "Celestial criteria measure service, not status." This gives us tremendous inspiration. J. Ruben Clark, Jr. said that "It is not important where we serve, but how we serve." Happiness of the human soul lies in humble service to others. The great symbolic beauty of our lives is simply to serve others, to give of ourselves. The eternal joy within us is a reflection of our hearts. The law of a pure heart and mind works like chemistry. If we have pure vision and a pure heart, they will expand.

From the Doctrine and Covenants:

But no man is possessor of all things except he be purified and cleansed from all sin.

And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever ye will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done. (D&C 50:28, 29)

It shall be done. I believe that we will go as far as we believe we are able to go. I also believe that you cannot get something from nothing. In the same sense, you cannot get anything from negative thinking. You go just as far as your vision.

I would like to share Hugh B. Brown's story of the bucket. President Brown once told what happened to a ship's captain down in the South Atlantic. He had run out of fresh water and his crew was athirst. Another ship came into sight and he signalled, "Send us water. Send us water." And the signal came back, "Let down your bucket. Let down your bucket. There is fresh water all around you. All around you. You are in the Gulf Stream." They let down their buckets and found that this was true. They had not realized that the course of the Gulf Stream as it was driven out had maintained its pure water--its virtue, so to speak. President Brown said that they were able to save themselves by that which was all around them, yet they did not know it. He said:

"Brethren and sisters, there is available to you wherever you are, blessings and opportunities, the privilege of teaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ if you let down your buckets, which is your own prayer, into the gulf stream of the Holy Spirit, which is everywhere."

Brothers and sisters, thank you for your great service. The world needs you. I am proud of you--the way you use the basic concepts of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in helping others. I wish we could have ten or twenty or fifty thousand LDS psychotherapists like you, or counselors or professional people such as you, because there is a tremendous need in the world for you.

You know, in Japan, when they take care of some mentally retarded people, they just give them a shot; that's all, because they don't have any basic or fundamental understanding of the gospel. Therefore, they cannot help. It is a hopeless situation. I have a friend whose daughter had this experience. I told him not to take her to the hospital. We went to an LDS psychotherapist and within six months he helped her return to normal. We must have the pure love of Christ and pray always when we face the problems of our professions.

I am expecting a lot from you because the Church is going to need you, especially the LDS people need you.
You know, I shouldn’t take the time, but I would like to leave you my testimony. Three and a half years ago President Kimball called me and asked me to come to Salt Lake. As I arrived and went into his room, he said, “The Lord has called you to serve in this capacity. Will you accept?”

And I could hear and I understood what he said, but I just could not comprehend it. I said, “President Kimball, could you kindly say it again for me?”

With his husky voice he said, “The Lord has called you to be a general authority.”

And then my wife and I, we just started crying—not because I was happy—I wasn’t! I wasn’t ready! I never thought in my whole life that I would be a “G.A.”.

We cried for a long time, and finally President Kimball asked, “Are you there, you folks? Do you want to go back to the hotel to pray about it? Do you think you can accept?” I just couldn’t answer. Finally he said, “You folks stay here. I will go out.” He started walking out the door and said, “You folks talk and then tell me.”

After about 30 minutes I said, “President Kimball, please, I just cannot accept this. I know the gospel is true. I know you are a prophet of the Lord.”

And then he said, “Let me tell you something. The Lord revealed to me that I should extend the call to you from the land of Japan. Is that a sufficient answer for you?”

My brothers and sisters, I hope and pray, humbly, that in a small way, a very small way, I can serve the members of the Church and can serve this great kingdom. I know that this gospel is true. I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know it. I know it. I love Heavenly Father. I know he lives. There is no name under the heavens whereby we might be saved other than Jesus of Nazareth. And this is his Church and we are his disciples. Thank you very much for your patience. I humbly pray this morning in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.