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# GOSPEL POWER IN TROUBLED HOMES

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**Of the Presidency of the**  
**First Quorum of the Seventy**  
**Presented at the AMCAP Convention**  
**5 October, 1984**

**M**y dear brothers and sisters, this is an honor and responsibility being with you this morning, recognizing that you perform such a vital function.

I understand that the speaker following me will instruct us on self-esteem. As my self-esteem becomes battered during my talk, I plan to remain for the next speaker to build my self-esteem back up. So if you will just bear with me, then we will look forward to the next speaker who is going to help all of us.

There is great collective power for good in this room in your commitment to increase righteousness. You have an overwhelming challenge being laborers in a vineyard where your assignments are at least as much to fight the weeds that are choking good growth as they are to nurture the fruitful vines.

## **Flooding Down from the Mountains**

We experienced extreme flooding earlier in 1984 along the Wasatch Front. The heavy snowfall melted, sending its waters cascading down into our valleys. We were deeply concerned. A call went out for volunteers and several hundred responded. There was a vitality of neighborliness that existed. Sandbags were filled and placed into position to control the flow of water and provide protection for the homes, schools, churches, and other valuable property. Occasionally water surged beyond its prescribed bounds, causing a great deal of damage and inconvenience.

What was the attitude toward the

snow in the mountains and its potential danger to homes and loved ones as warm temperatures brought devastation surging into our valleys? Were fists shaken in anger, expending valuable strength on meaningless motions that consumed energy but produced no positive results? No, we drew from the resources of the human mind in man's ability to control his environment. Areas of potential weakness were anticipated and defenses shored up to withstand the onslaught.

Now suppose we have a different kind of intrusion upon our comfort. This time we are not the objects of physical duress, but there flows into our presence a besmirching of things we hold sacred. Should we not shore up our defense? Is this a time to build channels of control for the ill winds that may blow? Should we not store in our reservoirs great spiritual resources to absorb and neutralize this onslaught?

## **Statistics on Family Violence**

May we review some statistics on family violence given to me by Brother Val MacMurray which will provide a contest for our discussion:

1. Nearly six million wives are physically abused by their husbands annually in the United States. Between 2,000 and 4,000 of these women are beaten to death.

2. Over one-third of these battered women say that they have also been raped or otherwise sexually abused by their husbands or co-habiting partners.

3. One in four husbands slap their wives, one in ten beat them with their fists, and one in 18 threaten them with weapons.

4. One million children are abused or neglected annually. Every year about 2,000 of them die as a result.

5. Between 25 and 38 percent of girls under 18 are sexually abused. Almost half of these sexual incidents occur within the family, where the girl is abused by a relative. Father-daughter incest is the most common form, with the average age for such incidents starting at about 10.

In your minds these statistics become part of your week's work.

### **The Latter-day Saint and Family Violence**

No matter where such cases occur, they are cause for serious concern. The fact that these statistics are gathered in the United States, where people are relatively well-educated and affluent, intensifies that concern. Even more serious is the fact that Latter-day Saints don't escape such grievous sins. Cases have come to our attention of husbands and fathers appearing to be active and responsible members of the Church, who are or have been involved in incidents of abuse and violence.

As professionals in providing therapy, with particular stewardship for our own Latter-day Saints, you are aware that the Church does not, at whatever level, view sexual or physical abuse with any degree of lightness. It accepts no excuses for such behavior. Any man participating in such activities has placed his priesthood in jeopardy, for the Lord's instructions are extremely clear on this point:

. . . The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and . . . the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. (D&C 121:36-37)

### **Righteous Use of Priesthood**

Even though ample cases exist to indicate that women are sometimes the abusers as well as the abused, and that children have also, many times, been the abusers of other children, may we consider primarily those situations in which men who are husbands and fathers have failed to provide the kind of example in the home that their families could expect from one holding the priesthood. In so doing, I echo the expression of concern pronounced by a loving Father in heaven in D&C 121:41: "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood. Only . . . by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned."

### **Put Your Own Oxygen Mask on First—Spiritual Air**

A couple of weeks ago an assignment took me to South America. As the plane was about to take off in Salt Lake, the Western flight attendant gave these instructions: "In the event of an emergency, oxygen masks will fall down automatically. Place your own mask firmly over your nose and mouth and breathe normally; then assist others in the placement of their masks." In Los Angeles I changed from Western to Varig, a Brazilian airline. As we took off, this same announcement was made: "In the event of an emergency, oxygen masks will fall down automatically. Place your own mask firmly on your nose and mouth and breathe normally; then assist others in the placement of their masks." This instruction was given in English and then in Spanish because our destination was Lima, Peru. This same instruction was then given in Portuguese for the Brazilians on board, and finally in Japanese because the plane had just landed coming from Tokyo and many Japanese were continuing their flight to South America.

Our bodies require a constant supply of air. We can go without food for a week or more, but oxygen must be available constantly. Recently my wife and I visited La Paz, Bolivia, high in the

Andes Mountains of South America. La Paz is at an altitude of approximately 13,000 feet. As we landed and descended from the plane, those who met us were very solicitous. We were told that because of the extremely thin air, we should walk slowly to the lounge. Once there, we were invited to sit down. I insisted I felt fine—but in a moment or two became light-headed, and I sat down. They supplied me with oxygen. I needed help.

### **Spiritual Air—How Obtained**

After several minutes of oxygen deprivation, we lose consciousness and life leaves us. Each spirit is housed in a physical tabernacle. There is a spiritual air upon which it is dependant for sustenance.

Do we ever find ourselves in a situation where our spirits are deprived of spiritual air? In such a spiritually threatening situation, where can we go to renew the quality of our spiritual air? Activities of fasting, prayer, scripture study, love, service, and sharing the gospel are bathed in their own atmosphere of spiritual air. This life-giving oxygen permeates our souls and we are sustained spiritually.

### **Results of Breathing Spiritual Air**

What are the results of breathing spiritual air? In Mosiah 5:2, we read about such a circumstance: "... because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change . . . in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually." Each moment love—the pure love of Christ—flows from us to others, we are generating this spiritual air within us to the point that we cannot contain its influence and we reach out to others. The process brings an automatic restoration within ourselves; we are renewed.

We partake of proper foods, acquire sufficient rest, and participate in some form of physical exertion to tone our physical bodies. Following these rules for good health brings a feeling of physical well-being.

In our daily routines we also study and internalize the scriptures; we accept certain covenants and participate in sacred ordinances. We spiritually meditate and ponder and attune ourselves to the power of heaven through prayer. This brings a feeling of spiritual well-being.

This isn't the end—it is but the beginning. Now we are ready to serve. Having our spiritual oxygen masks in place, now we reach out to others and do for them what they can't do for themselves.

### **Dual Responsibility as Latter-day Saint and as a Therapist**

You have a dual responsibility, to put on your own mask first and then reach out to others, or, in other words, *first* as a Latter-day Saint and *secondly* as a therapist. As Latter-day Saint men and women, your personal and family lives are examples for the troubled individuals and families who come to you for help—tangible evidence of the effects of fasting and prayer, scripture study, love, service, and sharing the gospel. In dealing with friends and associates, our love needs to reflect the love and respect due the individual as a child of God. Our behavior toward our family and friends communicates the commitment of love that initially brought us together and the continuing commitment toward the attributes of godliness in which we sustain and support each other.

Do we consider and appreciate the needs of each individual and strive to meet these needs appropriately? Do we regard their activities to be equally as important as our own? Do we expend special effort to assure that our families receive the same special treatment as those with whom we associate in our dealings away from home?

The Apostle Paul, in giving advice to the youthful bishop, Timothy, counseled, "But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith." (1 Tim. 5:8) This "providing for" includes not only economic and material needs but

those tender needs, needs pertaining to their self-esteem and the renewal of love that are so necessary to the emotional stability of us all. In this way we create a firm launching pad from which we can accelerate to our second responsibility and role as a therapist in counseling troubled individuals and families.

In addition to your role as a Latter-day Saint, you have a second responsibility in your role as a therapist in counseling troubled individuals and families. As you know, your task is not to assign guilt or pronounce judgments. The ecclesiastical systems of the Church and the legal systems of the state have judgment responsibilities. They can label and bring consequences for the offending behavior.

### Counseling Responsibility Three-Fold

In counseling, it would appear your responsibility is three-fold:

First, there must be cooperation with authorities in preventing further damage to innocent parties. Of particular concern are children who are dealing with feelings of love for a parent, and may be confused by inappropriate activities. As a result, these children may have been forced to assume responsibilities in a relationship that can only be asked of mature people. The redemption of Christ is available to everyone, but many people have put themselves in a position where they can no longer experience the light of Christ in a way that influences their behavior significantly. Nephi in chastising Laman and Lemuel tells them, "Ye have seen an angel, and he spake unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice. *But ye were past feeling*, that ye could not feel his words. . . ." (1 Ne. 17:45, italics added). Some offenders can no longer *do* works of righteousness without help. Until such help can be provided, nothing is more important than to prevent them from inflicting further damage upon their victims or from seeking new victims.

Second, you must help the victims

to understand what has happened, to resolve any feelings of confusion or guilt that may, if not treated, have a crippling impact upon themselves and upon their future families, and to provide these victims with the skills to protect themselves against further recurrences. In many cases, they need to know where they can receive help. They need someone with whom they can talk, if necessary over a period of several months. They need models of appropriate adult behavior. In many cases they have had both mothers and fathers who have been strangely passive in crucial personal matters. They need to know that there are appropriate ways to take charge of their lives, to deal with situations, to identify their own feelings, and to meet their own needs.

It is unfortunate that these children have been thrust into circumstances where they must acquire understanding and skills that would normally come over a long period of time in a safe environment where they could be tested and refined. It is urgent that they not be left vulnerable again to the persuasions of an adult, or prey to their own confused feelings.

Third, you must help the perpetrators of these crimes. I think of President Kimball, whose love is a deep-flowing well. Even in the black-and-white words of the printed text of a speech, or in his image projected on a television screen, President Kimball's love touches everyone. When in his presence, whether in a crowded conference hall or in a private meeting, no one can leave the room without feeling the refreshment and joy of that freely given love.

For some that human need to give and express love has been damned up, turned on itself, forced to find strange and torturous channels in the troubled individuals who would offer violence or sexual abuse to their own wives and children. As therapists, your professional training and skills will indicate to you the best way to approach these deficiencies so that these individuals may claim the promise of the Savior to those who understand and use their

priesthood correctly: "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distill upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion. . . ." (D&C 121:45-46)

Obviously these troubled individuals have a great deal of experience with compulsion. Many of them, from what I understand, have been the victims of sexual and physical abuse themselves. Many of them no doubt have never had the experience of being touched by the Holy Ghost in ways that they have been able to understand, or of feeling the redeeming love of the Savior. Your profession often provides opportunities for you to use your skills as a lifeguard.

### **You Can Recognize Someone Drowning in Emotional Distress**

On my return flight from Tacna, Peru, as I boarded the airplane in Dallas, Texas, I found myself seated alone. Following dinner a trainee flight attendant came and sat by me and we had the following conversation:

"I'm not a quitter," she said.

Surprised with this expression, I looked at her and said, "You don't look like a quitter."

"I don't like the way people are treating me."

"What is causing you that concern?"

"I just don't like it."

Not knowing exactly what was happening, I asked, "Where are you going? How are you enjoying your flight attendant experience?"

"I am not enjoying it."

"Wasn't it wonderful that Sharlene Wells was made Miss America?"

"Well, I was in the Miss Utah Pageant, a contestant against her."

"Oh, is that right? That is wonderful! What talent do you have?"

"I played the piano."

"How long have you played the piano?"

"Oh, for about 12 years."

"You don't look that old to me." I was trying to cheer her up.

We talked about her schooling at Utah State University and her desire to travel. The conversation so far was not making any sense. All of a sudden, she said she had work to do. As she stood up I observed that she looked completely lost. She soon returned and we resumed our conversation.

"I don't like the way people treat me," she said.

"Well, then, you just sit here, and we'll chat."

It was obvious that she was really depressed. I tried to express positive things about her and complimented her on being qualified to be in the Miss Utah pageant and having attended a university. There was very little intelligent response, very little response at all.

By this time the "fasten seatbelt" sign came on. She said, "The fasten seatbelt sign is on; I wonder if I should go up and announce that?" I said, "Why don't you just sit here and take care of me?" By this time I was getting knowing looks from the flight attendants. The plane started down, and she indicated she did not want the plane to come down.

I offered to be of help to her when we landed and indicated my wife would be there to meet me. She assured me her parents were coming and that she would like to meet my wife. I told her I would wait just outside the plane while she got her things together. She said, "Oh, don't leave me." So we sat back down and waited until every passenger left the plane. When she went to find her luggage she came back with the wrong suitcase. As she went to the back to look for her own luggage, one of the other flight attendants thanked me for my help. They may have been grateful for my help, but I was wishing some of you people could have been there with your professional insight—you see, I did not even recognize the symptoms under which this young lady was operating so that I might address her needs more directly. We then walked to

the front door of the plane, where the father and mother of the girl were waiting for her. The mother had extreme anxiety on her face. They were shocked to see her. I had given her a card on the plane but she asked if I could give her another card. My reply was that she could have as many cards as she wanted. Introductions were made to Helen and we bid farewell. I was able to determine where her parents lived and after a couple of days had passed, I called and talked to her mother. The mother began to apologize. She had thought I was an employee of the airline who was responsible for her daughter's release from flight attendant school. Her mother related other disappointments in her daughter's life. The daughter and her parents came to Salt Lake and had lunch with me.

When my daughter Suzanne, an R.N., came down to visit with us this morning, I related this story of the girl on the airplane. Then I asked her if I could share some ideas on the talk I was planning for Mormon counselors. She said, "Dad, you have just had an experience that you ought to make part of your talk." I asked her what she meant. She said, "You were trying to deal with someone who had lost contact with reality and apparently her having been rejected as Miss Utah and as a flight attendant, and probably another rejection in her love life, caused her to snap. And that was what you had beside you."

You counselors and psychotherapists have the capability to recognize emotional distress.

You can pull such victims from troubled waters and help them remove the restraining entanglements.

You can place them on the beach where the warm rays of heavenly light will raise the temperature and the blood will flow more freely and begin to nurture the brain.

You can help unclutter their minds and point them in the direction of all power.

After such help, these individuals will be in a position to be receptive and influenced by ecclesiastical leaders who

have the responsibility and mandate to give them experiences with fasting, prayer, reading of the scriptures, and priesthood blessings. As they continue to gain strength and their thinking processes become more clear, a greater susceptibility to the Spirit will occur, thus opening the conduit to that divine source which can be relied upon to change feelings most directly, most powerfully, and most permanently—healing can then take place.

You will face a special challenge in those situations where you are dealing with an individual who has somehow been able to define "priesthood" to include his inappropriate activities as a legitimate exercise of patriarchal authority. Helping such a person to create an image of reality that corresponds to the Father's view of love and sacrifice will be a particular part of your challenge.

Such individuals need a reminder that they are willfully distorting the teachings of the Church. Some of these individuals will have done harm to their families and removed themselves so far from the steady light of Christ that they may never be able to take their place in that family circle again. It may appear that the violation of their temple covenants has been so severe as to forfeit their sealings to their wives and children. However, we do not know about their eternal status. It is not for us to exclude them from the larger family that constitutes the family of God, our Eternal Father.

Just as priesthood brings great power, so it also brings great responsibility. Those who have proved themselves unworthy of that responsibility will also be denied its power, no matter what claims they make. But this determination lies with the ecclesiastical leaders of those individuals and ultimately in the hands of the judge we all must face to account for our stewardships. As the Savior reminded us, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick . . . I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Matt. 9:12-13) "The worth of souls is

great in the sight of God." (D&C 18:10) Our responsibility is to reach out and help.

### **I Have No Hands But Yours**

As the residents of a small community in France surveyed the damage caused by bombing during World War II, it was concluded the rebuilding should begin at the central plaza where fragments of a statue of the Christ lay scattered amidst the rubble. Piece by piece the statue once again took shape. The form stood complete except for the hands. Disappointment brought the suggestion that the statue be removed from the square but traditional feelings would not allow its removal. After much consideration a plaque was constructed and attached to the base of the Christ which read, "I have no hands but yours."

May the Lord bless you as your hands are instrumental in reaching out, in touching and lifting—pointing the

right direction to his sons and daughters. May you be blessed to work beyond your natural means, being receptive of knowledge but commissioned at our educational institutions, and be touched by the Spirit and be lifted to help others needing your support, support that can be extended through your outstretched hands.

I bear you my witness that Jesus is the Christ. This is his church. The gospel principles to which all the scriptures contribute are not something conceived in the minds of men. They are principles that are eternal, and as we attach ourselves to those principles and put on our own spiritual oxygen masks—then we can reach out with our hands and touch and inspire and love others who may need enrichment in this pursuit. This is a most wonderful contribution you can and are making. I say these things humbly, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.