



10-1-1986

"My Peace I Give Unto You"

Elder Dean L. Larsen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp>

Recommended Citation

Larsen, Elder Dean L. (1986) ""My Peace I Give Unto You"," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*: Vol. 12 : No. 2 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol12/iss2/2>

This Article or Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

“MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU”

Elder Dean L. Larsen

Of the Presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy

Keynote Address AMCAP Convention

2 October 1986

It is good to be with you today. I appreciate the invitation. Before I go further, I must make a comment regarding something that happened yesterday. Apparently, some little notification appeared in the local newspapers yesterday about the program today, and, I presume, as a result of that, the Church Public Communications Department called and asked if I would share with them the text of my talk. I had to confess I didn't have a text. And I confess it to you. That is not to imply that I have not given considerable thought to what I would like to share with you today, but I felt that I would like to have a little more freedom than a prepared text would give me. I hope this will not be a disappointment to you, and if it is I give my apologies in advance. If it is necessary that some kind of report be made of what I say today, and if anything occurs of sufficient value to warrant such a report, perhaps someone could make notes and afterwards compile some kind of recapitulation of the proceedings. I hope to be rather informal and perhaps even involve some of you in a discussion of shared areas of concern. And I hope that will not be inappropriate. I sincerely hope that what we do will be useful to you. The chalkboard here suggests something of a classroom atmosphere, but it isn't that I intended to be the teacher today. I was hoping to be able to use this to construct a simple representation of some ideas that we might discuss.

On the opposite ends of this chalkboard I am going to construct two simple rectangles that will represent the spectrum between the conditions that we call "health" and "sickness." I will connect these two rectangles with three lines that are to represent three basic areas of our lives in which we experience degrees of health or sickness. These

representations will be oversimplifications, but I hope they will be useful in our discussion. I will let these three connecting lines represent the spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of our lives. All of us have an interest in these three areas. Some of us might be considered as professional practitioners who have an interest in helping others to enjoy a healthy condition in these areas.

As Latter-day Saints we should have no difficulty in recognizing the interrelationships among the spiritual, emotional, and physical elements in our lives. We really can't isolate one from the others. I don't think there is any question, for example, that there is a direct relationship between one's physical condition and his emotional stability, and often the reverse might also be true. Certainly both of these have bearing upon the spiritual condition, and one's spiritual condition may well have an effect upon his physical and emotional health. I mention this to lay a foundation for some of the observations I would like to share with you today.

In my role as a spiritual adviser, I sometimes encounter those who are suffering from emotional problems and, not infrequently, those who have physical difficulties. At times those of us who have ecclesiastical responsibilities are asked to administer to those who have emotional and physical problems. All of us have had experiences of this kind in which we have observed the results of prayer and faith. Sometimes these results are almost miraculous. The Lord, in some instances, responds to prayers and to the exercising of faith to intervene in all three of these areas of our lives. But frequently he does not.

I have to recognize as a spiritual adviser, or as a spiritual leader, that conditions may exist in an individual's life that I may not be able to deal with effectively without the kind of help that you can give, or without the help that those who practice medicine can give. By the same token, I would sincerely hope and trust you will recognize that people have profound spiritual needs that may not be fulfilled by the professional expertise you may bring to bear. Does anyone want to comment on or disagree with this premise?

One other idea, then, might be represented by this very simple graph. I will draw a vertical line that intersects the three parallel horizontal lines which we have said represent the spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of our lives. It will be somewhere between the two poles that we have identified as sickness and health. This vertical line will represent the arbitrary point at which certain symptoms appear in the life of an individual which cause us to speak of that individual as being "sick." To illustrate further, at some point along this range that represents the emotional part of our lives there can emerge some

kind of behavior that we consider to be abnormal and that requires treatment in a particular way. The same thing can be true in a spiritual sense. That is, we may find people living in such a way that their lives appear to be out of harmony with spiritual principles, and we express the same kind of concern and anticipate something of the same kind of special need on their behalf. Certainly this can be true in the physical part of our lives as well.

Most of you, I suspect, devote the major part of your time professionally dealing with people in this area, along the "emotional" line beyond the point where it verges toward "sickness." Is that correct? One of the things I would like to suggest to you today is that in the area along this range of emotional and spiritual health where we generally think of people as being well, or adjusted, or healthy, there are many who are experiencing difficulties and needs that often go unobserved. In this environment of complexity and diversity and stress we need to become more aware of these needs that are not always overtly observable in people's lives and that may be pushing them toward the "sickness" pole. *We* need to be increasingly alert to the needs, not only here where abnormality begins to surface, but increasingly here in this area where people may appear to be dealing successfully with the challenges and problems they are faced with. There are needs that are peculiar to our own time, and they probably will not diminish in our lifetime.

I have attempted to discover some scriptural terms that might represent these two points that I have described as "health" and "sickness." The best term that I have been able to discover relating to "health" is the term *peace*. The Savior said:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
(John 14:27)

The Savior himself is a source of peace, of reassurance. He is an anchor, a refuge; and one who accepts him as the Son of God and recognizes in him all the possibilities and opportunities in an eternal sense that he extends to us finds a principal source of peace. That idea is repeated in another way, interestingly, in section 39 of the Doctrine and Covenants in which the Savior says:

And this is my gospel—repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom.

(D&C 39:6)

I would have to interpret from this statement that there is, in the proper understanding of the gospel and in our living in compliance with its principles, a source of peace, of emotional and spiritual strength. We need to recognize this in our attempts to help others.

The opposite of peace is a little harder to come by in specific scriptural terms. *Contention* comes close, but it's not altogether satisfactory. Yet, if it's considered broadly as representing conflict and stress, then it serves better. The scriptures make it clear that noncompliance with gospel principles is destructive of peace. "Wickedness never was happiness." This is difficult for some people to believe as they observe the apparent pleasure with which so many live dissolute lives. This apparent paradox is sometimes disconcerting.

A week or two ago I was seated next to a young woman on a flight from the East. She was going to Denver, she said, to conduct a training seminar for people of the company she represented. I asked her how she enjoyed her work. She was very fulfilled. She was enjoying the alcoholic beverages that the flight attendants brought to her as we conversed. Then she told me, "Really, I have everything. I have more than I ever dreamed of having." She talked of her work and then said she had found the man of her dreams. They were just completing decorating and furnishing a beach-front condominium. She said it was just what they wanted. There was no intention of marriage. She told about their traveling together in Europe and what an enjoyable time they had had, and how thrilled her mother and father were with him and with their relationship. All of this seems in direct contradiction to what I have just represented regarding the relationship between peace and compliance with gospel principles. Yet it is not difficult for us to predict from all we have observed in our lives that inevitably this young woman is headed for some disillusionment and unhappiness.

Now, let me come back to the often-concealed needs of so many who appear to be, by surface observation, spiritually and emotionally healthy. The observations that follow will not surprise most of you, because you encounter people in your daily professional work who reflect the kinds of difficulties that I am going to point to now. I believe we must become more wise and more sensitive in dealing with these problems than we have ever been before, both ecclesiastically and professionally. I seem to be encountering more and more frequently in my circulation among the membership of the Church, people who are honestly trying to avoid sin, who are really doing their best, as they understand, to live in accordance with the principles of

the gospel but who are unhappy, frustrated, and disillusioned to a considerable degree. Let me use extractions from several letters that have come to me from such people to illustrate the nature of the problem to which I refer:

Please understand, we are trying. We know that these are the last days, and so much needs to be done. We do not want to be numbered among the inactives, but for the first time it is beginning to look better and better.

Have you ever run into people like that? Here is another:

Is it really a matter of piling it on to see how much one can take? A survival of the fittest? I can't imagine Heavenly Father wanting it to be this way.

There is some anguish in that serious question. These are not all from the same individual. Here is another:

Life has ceased to have any meaning for me. I cannot see any way out except to quit. I just wish I could walk away from all of it—sometimes from everything.

There is some desperation expressed here—in the life of one who is obviously a member trying to do what's right. How do you account for that? Is this something you need to be prepared to come to grips with in your profession? What might be done to help these people? What are some of the things that may be happening in the lives of these people, things that would not be readily apparent, but might be contributing to their frustrations?

Comment: There are so many expectations that are generated for people today.

Elder Larsen: Is there anyone who wants to comment on that and expand on it, to become a little more specific?

Comment: There is a guilt complex reflected in these letters—"God does not love me, . . ." "I'm not measuring up. . . ."

Elder Larsen: Does it relate to the magnitude and diversification of the expectations these people feel are imposed on them or that they generate for themselves?

Comment: It relates to perfection.

Elder Larsen: And achieving perfection is a correct principle, isn't it? But it is apparently a source of great frustration to many who don't feel they are achieving it as quickly as they feel they should, or as somebody else feels they should.

Comment: When the gospel is misunderstood, it seems to be a source of contention.

Elder Larsen: We need to be particularly careful in our ecclesiastical and professional roles that we don't raise expectations so broad and so numerous that people can't cope with them. Let me share with you one other comment that came in another letter—this one in response to the *New Era's* printing (Feb. 1986, pp. 4–9) of a talk I had given at a BYU fireside. I spoke on the subject "The Peaceable Things of the Kingdom." I believe I received more response to and reaction from what I tried to say on that occasion than I have on any other thing I have said or done since I came into this position ten years ago—more letters, more telephone calls, more personal visits, sometimes from people whose names you would readily recognize. Here is one I have chosen because the woman is very articulate and has said well what others with less ability to put their feelings into words have tried to say:

How grateful I am to you for bringing these things out in the open.

Elder Larsen: That in itself is interesting.

I fit so closely with the emotionally and spiritually burned-out person you describe.

For the first time I can see the reason why I have never felt peace, even though I try so hard to do what's right. Your message has done more for me than all the anti-depressants and psychiatrists' visits I have made. It's like you have given me permission to enjoy the road back to Heavenly Father, instead of beating myself frantically toward Him.

There is some real pathos in this. Now, this is not an isolated reaction. I don't think that is an isolated feeling or condition among our own people today, and I believe sincerely it is one of the significant challenges that you and I and those with whom we are associated are going to have to deal with in this stressful, challenging time. How do we do it successfully so that people don't become disillusioned about the gospel, or lose faith in the Savior and the refuge and source of peace that he represents?

Let me quote a few lines from the talk I gave (3 Feb. 1985) to which this last correspondent reacted:

Some of us create such a complexity of expectations for ourselves that it is difficult to cope with the magnitude of them. Sometimes we establish so many particulars by which to evaluate and rate ourselves that it becomes difficult to feel successful and worthy to any degree at any time. We can drive ourselves unmercifully toward perfection on such a broad plane. When this compulsion is intensified by sources outside

ourselves, the problem is compounded. Confronting these demands can bring mental and emotional despair.

Everyone needs to feel successful and worthy in some ways at least part of the time. The recognition of our frailties need not propel us to try to achieve perfection in one dramatic commitment of effort. (p. 6)

That to me seems to be particularly important.

The best progress sometimes comes when we are not under intense duress. Overzealousness is at least as much to be feared as apathy. Trying to measure up to too many particular expectations without some sense of self-tolerance can cause spiritual and emotional "burn-out."

In order to avoid the effects of too many external and internal pressures, it is not necessary nor wise to withdraw from all of life's challenges. This would only compound our difficulties. To enjoy the "peaceable things of the kingdom," we must find warm acceptance, love, and understanding from those who have the most direct influence on our lives. (p. 6)

Here is another quotation from the same talk:

Another factor that has a bearing upon whether or not we experience peace in our lives has to do with our being able to realistically respond to expectations that others have for us and the demands they sometimes make of us. In responding to these expectations, we must successfully evaluate between fundamentally important values and the sometimes superficial or outward performances that others may expect from us. This requires that we recognize real truth and demonstrate integrity to it. Peace of mind comes when we know we are doing the right thing for the right reasons.

For some reason one of the most common methods many of us use to motivate is to develop feelings of guilt within ourselves or in others for whom we have a responsibility. (pp. 7-8)

Have you been to a church meeting lately where you were made to feel that way? If we play upon the guilt of people who are earnestly striving to become perfect with an almost unending diversification of expectations which seem to come simultaneously, we can overwhelm them and cause them to feel as if their eternal prospects are hopeless. One additional quotation:

Guilt feelings are a natural product of an injured conscience. When we willfully violate a valid code of conduct, we suffer the consequences of our infraction in the internal conflict that occurs within our souls. Such

feelings, painful and remorseful though they may be, can generate the desire to repent and improve. They can be useful, constructive emotions that propel us forward to greater perfection.

But purposefully generating feelings of guilt over some shortcoming as a means of motivating action or promoting more compliant behavior is rarely productive. (p. 8)

I suggest to you today, brothers and sisters, that this is one of our great challenges—how we motivate and encourage without intensifying so greatly the pressures and the stresses that our efforts become counterproductive. Is it possible to do that? I would earnestly hope and pray so and suggest to you that that's one of the areas we will have to deal with increasingly on both of these levels—the spiritual and the emotional. There are some today who feel the Church is a great insatiable, demanding institution—cold, impersonal, and unyielding. And to the degree we have made it appear that way to others, shame on us. We have a responsibility to represent the Lord and his work in a way that will not bring those results.

Have I said that in an acceptable way? I hope so.

In the past several years, studies have been made and are being made among some segments of the Church population primarily to determine what things seem to have the greatest impact or influence in people's lives to help them become spiritually mature and at peace. I have not had an opportunity to go through some of those studies carefully, but I have reviewed virtually all of them to some degree, and some of them I have reviewed very closely. It is interesting to me that in all of these studies three things seem to emerge regularly as having tremendous importance in the acquiring and maintaining of spiritual health and well-being. These may not be surprising to you, and yet may be because they are so standard and foundational to the gospel we don't give them as much attention as we need to. One is *prayer*. People who will pray regularly and out of the genuine recognition of the source of peace, comfort, and security that Deity represents have a tremendously powerful and stabilizing influence in life. The second thing is the *study of the scriptures*—regular study. There is something about scripture study that is tremendously significant, more so, it seems, than we have ever realized before, even though attention has been given to this in the past. Its effect upon stability and spiritual and emotional health is very potent. The third thing is something we don't talk about quite so much. The third thing is a *disposition to do something good for someone else*, an inclination to forget self in a concern for someone else. Now, I'm not just talking about church

service. Assigned church service is important, but I refer more to an attitude or a disposition to be alert to the needs of others and then the determination to make an effort in some way to respond to those needs. There is apparently something so very Christ-like about that attribute that it represents a tremendously strong underpinning of emotional and spiritual strength. I share that with you simply to suggest that maybe this disposition is something we all need to consider as we counsel with people. The more we can help to turn them outside themselves and to become conscious of and anxious to help others, the more we may be able to help them overcome their own problems. Those three things are of tremendous importance.

I hope that I have not understated or given too little attention to the importance of the real source of spiritual strength in our lives, which is, of course, a belief in and reliance upon our Heavenly Father and the Savior, Jesus Christ. They are the most secure refuge that we have. I know that, and I know from my own experience and my experience with others.

Generally, when we are invited to stake conferences we spend Saturday evening in the home of the stake president with whom we visit. That's not always the case, but generally it is. And those are always rich experiences, as we have the opportunity to meet with some truly great people of the world. Sometimes these are interesting experiences. I was recently in a stake in the Midwest and stayed with a stake president who had rather modest means and a large family. They lived in a home that was an older home—not spacious, with only one bathroom and one bedroom downstairs, and that was the one used by the parents. There were eight children. When we got to their home Saturday night we had a little refreshment, and I had an opportunity to meet with the children; then the children all hurried upstairs to bed. The stake president and his wife insisted that I use their bedroom. I protested. I said that I could sleep on the couch or anywhere. I protested until I could tell I was beginning to offend them and hurt their feelings, so I proceeded to their bedroom downstairs, and they went upstairs somewhere with the children. About midnight the door to the bedroom opened and I heard a little boy's voice call, "Daddy." In an instant, before I was fully awake, their little two-year-old son was in bed with me and had his arms wrapped around my neck. He said simply, "I had a dream about a monster." And I didn't want to add to his trauma, so I didn't say anything. I put my arm over him and patted him and in an instant he was asleep. I drifted off again, but sometime later I was awakened. In the darkness of the room the youngster was sitting up in bed, running his fingers

over my face. He sensed something was wrong. I said, "Would you like to go where your mommy and daddy are?" He said, "Uh, huh." I led him over to the door, and by that time his father had heard our voices and was standing at the head of the stairs waiting for his son. There was something almost symbolic in that experience. As I lay awake for awhile and thought about the experience, I realized that in that bedroom, in that home, that little boy knew he had sanctuary. There was security there. There was safety and acceptance and love. I thought how tremendously important that is. He instinctively knew where to go for that support and reassurance. It seems to me that each one of us has to have that kind of place to go. Prayer and a relationship with our Heavenly Father and the feeling we have for the Savior, those things are tremendously important to us. The principles of the gospel and our understanding of them can help. But we need to help one another as well.

The Lord says in the Doctrine and Covenants:

If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.

(D&C 42:61)

There is more to learn as we seek to help one another, and we must learn more, particularly in today's stressful environment. Life will probably become more complicated, more difficult. The challenges will increase. But as we earnestly and honestly pray to understand and do our tasks better, we have the promise that inspiration will be available to us.

May I share one more thing with you before I conclude. I came home this past Monday night, after traveling from a stake conference outside the country. I was concerned about the preparation for this meeting with you as well as the events of a general conference week. In an effort to relax a little before retiring, I pulled from a bookshelf a book of poetry by Edgar A. Guest. I found these verses:

The happiest nights
I ever know
Are those when I've
No place to go,
And the missus says
When the day is through:
"To-night we haven't
A thing to do."

Oh, the joy of it,
 And the peace untold
 Of sitting 'round
 In my slippers old,
 With my pipe and book
 In my easy chair,
 Knowing I needn't
 Go anywhere.

Needn't hurry
 My evening meal
 Nor force the smiles
 That I do not feel,
 But can grab a book
 From a near-by shelf
 And drop all sham
 And be myself.

Oh, the charm of it
 And the comfort rare;
 Nothing on earth
 With it can compare;
 And I'm sorry for him
 Who doesn't know
 The joy of having
 No place to go.

(“No Place to Go,” *A Heap O' Livin'*, pp. 110–11)

I think we all need that sometimes, too, and we shouldn't feel guilty.

May the Lord bless us and help us in our attempts to be serviceable to others. I express to you my personal, deep appreciation for the great good that you do in your own ecclesiastical service in the Church and in the professional service that you give as well.

May the Lord bless you in all you do, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Works Cited

- Guest, Edgar A. (1916). “No Place to Go.” *A Heap O' Livin'* (pp. 110–11). Chicago: Reilly Britton Co.
- Larsen, Dean L. (1986, February). *The New Era*, pp. 4–9.