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A Road Map to Hope

Elder John K. Carmack
Of the Seventy
3 October 1985

I approach you in a humility born of struggle. My life as a lawyer, a people's lawyer, brought me into daily contact with people from all walks of life—people with legal problems and people with emotional problems. Some were serious! One of my first cases after I went into the private practice of law was straightening out a mess left by a friend whose pain finally led him to commit suicide. He made one last try to pay his mounting gambling debts by a trip to Lake Tahoe, then took his life leaving a note to his wife that she should bring her problems to me, and I would solve them. There were enough problems to go around, but eventually, as is true with most problems, we saw them through together. I think I shall always be haunted by the memory of Karl coming to the Westwood Ward, gazing steadily at me as I was involved in an activity with other ward members, then leaving suddenly—the night before his suicide.

Years later another client, unable to withstand the pain of loneliness caused by the hospitalization of his wife due to a severe stroke which took from his wife the ability to speak, put a bullet through his head leaving a similar note directing his heirs to me to handle the problems remaining. He was probably a typical passive, dependent personality type. Emotional pain, whether caused by financial distress, loneliness, or dozens of other dirty tricks which life plays on us, is real. In extreme cases, it is life threatening.

One of my close Los Angeles friends, a man of high ambitions and ideals, was married to a woman who worshipped him. When he restlessly sought excitement through female companionship outside the home, she tried every way she could to let him know that she could not stand the pain and shattered ego brought about by his infidelity and rejection. Finally, in despair, she apparently used the only weapon she felt was available to her which was to take her life. In effect, by her suicide she was saying, "John, I told you I was deeply hurt and you continued right on doing what I couldn't accept. Maybe you will now realize that I meant what I said!" These are some of the more sobering experiences of my twenty years of practicing law in Los Angeles. One learns a lot, but there is also a growing humility and a tendency to abandon the feeling that you or your philosophy is preeminent and that you have all of the answers to people's painful struggles.

I struggled as a lawyer to help people in trouble. Usually, the solution to people's problems was not entirely legal, but required spiritual and psychological human assistance as well. The most difficult part of practicing law was dealing with the complexities of human nature. It was also the most rewarding. Getting a number of business partners to come together in a common cause to solve a legal partnership dispute against another equally complex set of humans with varied objectives is often how a law suit is settled or won after a court battle. Some of the most satisfying experiences of my life have been assisting and guiding human beings in their struggle to find peace, meaning, and success in their relationships with other human beings.

But I also experienced pain myself and learned humility when I discovered that I had insufficient tools or wisdom to solve a particularly thorny case, or when I failed in an attempt to understand and help another human being. Additionally, when one's motives are impugned, more painful lessons are learned. Apparently, there is no other way to truly grow, evolve, and develop but by actual experience under the loving tutorship of a God committed to the principles of free will or free agency. We learn only incrementally. We find a piece of the puzzle here and a piece there. The Lord put it well when he said:

For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: for with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. . . . [Not to imply that He is deficient in language, but He has to use words we understand.]

But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken! [Which is how we often react as He tries to guide and inspire us by telling us things we should know (Isaiah 28: 10, 11, 13).

But in this tutorial experience, we should not be too hard on ourselves and others. We will often be clumsy and fail, but if we stop and think about it, we will realize that the lord has not been successful with all of his children either, at least in this life. Some are rebellious, others disobedient, weak, full of unruly appetite; some cannot bring into their lives discipline while others are disciplined but intolerant. Some are even influenced by evil forces in their actions and in their choices. I know of no one to whom God has entrusted all of the answers to the questions we of the priesthood and we of the professions represented here grapple with. But we keep learning and never stop trying. Progress is apparent in knowledge of the principles and tools which can help, but the number in need of such assistance is multiplying.

There is a nice theological debate about whether God gains new knowledge. I know the answer theologically, but I wonder if even God, Himself, having created this world in which to test his children and tutor them through experience, sometimes feels like shaking his head in wonder at the reaction of men and women to circumstances they face.

We get some hint of God's work in the great Moses 1:39 statement that God's work and glory is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man!" How patient and kind he must be as we stumble and fall and grow from gracelessness to grace. Since we are partners in that work, that also becomes our work and glory.

Just when I thought I knew something about mankind, I was sent out into the mission field and was given 450 missionaries to work with over a three year span of time. These missionaries were mostly young adults, but also included brothers and sisters of all ages. This taught me in a more intense way about man, his complexity and varying nature.

One could easily be overwhelmed with the variety of circumstances one faces in the environment of a mission. People “ooh” and “ah” at the exotic geographical assignment a couple is given in the mission fields of the Church, but the geography has little to do with the real work of a mission president. It is the inner workings of men and women which form the grist and become the essence of a mission. The glory of a mission is not just in the number of converts baptized and confirmed having obtained a testimony and hope in Christ, although that is very important, but the glory is in the growth and development of the missionaries who are placed in the charge of the president. It becomes a “bully” laboratory for a committed couple. And that growth is incremental—here a little and there a little. Fortunately, one begins to gain a perspective of human needs and those needs begin to fit into recurring patterns after a time. This makes possible a more intelligent and effective approach to the challenges faced daily in a mission. About the time your education fits you for the challenge you are released to return home, probably never to be called upon in a similar challenge again. Such are the ironies of life.

Nevertheless, so individual and varied is the growth which the missionaries experience that one almost becomes sympathetic to the existentialist school of thought which, in its religious dimension, holds that religion involves a decision which must be made separately and individually by each person, usually without conclusive evidence.

I am not an existentialist philosophically, but I have tried to understand that movement built upon pioneer thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish protestant theologian and philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, the great German philosopher, and others. I particularly like the notion widely held by existentialist thinkers that man is free because he makes choices and that he is responsible

for those choices. Therein lies growth and development. Man does seem to be “condemned to be free.” And with that freedom comes variety. The variety of problems seems to be increasing as our families undergo turmoil, separation, and as roles of father and mother become blurred and confused.

In a great talk given in Washington, D.C. by Harold M. Voth, M.D., senior psychiatrist and psychoanalyst at the Menninger Foundation in Kansas, he asserted that:

The crucible from which all life springs is the family. The events within the family can make or break the individual and collectively, civilization ... not only must the family survive, but its internal workings must function in ways that turn out strong men and women—not weak ones who eventually become casualties of one form or another or who may work actively against the best values and traditions of our country.

Dr. Voth continued by analyzing the means by which families lead children to maturity. He also observed that often a child born biologically a male or female does not receive the resources, development, and shepherding to bring harmony between the biological and psychological sides, “thereby developing a solid sense of maleness and femaleness!” Of course, malfunctioning homes bring these and a variety of other problems into the lives of missionaries who enter into the Lord’s service. Many of their problems can be worked out by the individual, but we must assist a growing number towards maturity and spiritual health. My term as a mission president has allowed me a peek into a cross section of our homes. That squinty peek into our homes has basically warmed my heart and left me optimistic. But there is also a dark corner or two which is worrisome.

Perhaps it is a miracle that we turn out as many maturely functioning men and women as we do both now and throughout our history, but this is an alarming time when the civilization we love and the values we have held dear in the past are in grave danger. Such studies as *New Rules* by Yankelovich and *Megatrends* by Naisbitt document some of the enormous changes in the principles accepted as the norm by people today. A mission president and his wife, receiving a sampling of presumably our best youth, nevertheless encounter a seemingly endless stream of

problems faced by young and old. Our bishops have much the same experience. The glory comes as they see so many triumph and grow in ways which are so subtle that they can only truly share their feelings with someone having like experiences. The roles of spiritual father, leader and counselor become, to a mission president and bishop, laboratory training not unrelated to that which professional psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors and therapists experience. All of us marvel at man's capacity to grow, his complexity, and the endless opportunities to tutor, treat, rescue, assist, and serve.

I now borrow from a concept articulated by M. Scott Peck, M.D. in his splendid book *The Road Less Traveled*. We are constantly trying to help each other along life's road by a number of means such as teaching people to delay gratification thus allowing them to experience greater good, helping people establish personal discipline, teaching them to give and receive love, and gently leading people to bring reality into their lives. To help us along that road of life it is essential to have a true road map—a map which is constantly being made more accurate and true and which must be kept current. As the world changes, our map must be updated.

To illustrate, suppose you are a tourist who wants to explore Salt Lake City. Suppose you have a twenty-year-old map of the city. None of the high-rise buildings we see in Salt Lake City today even existed twenty years ago. To tour Salt Lake City with an outdated map which does not show the new buildings would be confusing and unhelpful. We need to see things as they are. We would insist that our map of the city be up-to-date and accurate.

The Lord through the Prophet Joseph Smith gave us this definition of truth: "truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come!" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:24). That definition is simple, but profound.

Henry Eyring told his son as he was about to start his study of mining engineering at the university:

I'm convinced that the Lord used the Prophet Joseph Smith to restore his church. For me, that is a reality. I haven't any doubt about it. Now,

there are a lot of other matters that are much less clear to me. But in this church you don't have to believe anything that isn't true. You go over to the University of Arizona and learn everything you can, and whatever is true is a part of the gospel. The Lord is actually running this universe (Henry Eyring, *Reflections of a Scientist*, pp. 6–7).

This is a virile kind of religion. It is constantly being updated with new knowledge and is made more and more accurate and true. This is the gospel in which I can believe and which I trust.

President Kimball taught:

The gospel is true beyond all questioning. There may be parts of it we do not yet know and fully understand, but we shall never be able to prove it untrue for it includes all truth, known and unknown, developed and undeveloped. (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p. 24.)

I feel a person is healthier if he has a road map for life which is basically true. The more fairy tales and the more out-of-date myths there are on one's road map, the more it will be like the rocky or sandy soil of Jesus' parable of the seeds, or as the jelly-like understructure of Mexico City, which made conditions so much worse for people during the earthquake. On our road map leading to health and ultimately back to God, we must have truth and reality.

We inherit so much excess baggage from homes where love, discipline, and faith do not sufficiently exist. This hurts us. It is not easy to correct a map created by years of cynicism, hypocrisy, cruelty, indulgence, or indifference in a home. And in a home in which unwittingly faith is undermined, faith often does not appear on our road map.

Now, I would like to broaden the perspective of my remarks, building on the Peck analogy. If our road map ends at the state line, we are ill-prepared to move beyond the boundaries of our state. We become a prisoner of those boundaries. Our planning for a nation-wide road trip is severely handicapped under those circumstances. Our road map is deficient. We don't even know which road within the state to take which will lead us toward our destination, whether it be east, or west, or north or south.

Paul said it well: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable!" (I Corinthians 15: 19). It helps to know where we are going and whether there are roads with which we need to connect in an adjacent state. There is power in a more complete map. Author Robert Bolt, in his *Man For All Seasons*, had Sir Thomas More say to his executioner as he put on the black mask before the terrible axe was raised aloft, "Friend, be not afraid of your office. You send me to God!" A more complete road map coupled with faith in Christ casts out fear and cowardice. In our work we need to remember that our road map should include events guiding principles before our birth and after our death, to the extent these events and principles are known, and quietly build it into our system.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, with a solid and correct road map, gave his last ounce of strength in preparing and presenting that great faith promoting sermon last April. He was a bright and living example of one who followed his road map into the next life. We can call what he became a living example of "hope," which he once defined as "the desire of faithful people to gain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God hereafter." He added that "hope is always centered in Christ!"

If our road map contains a look at the next world, somehow it helps bring perspective and reality to this one. C. S. Lewis once said, "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next." He added, "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you will get neither!" (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*).

Some amazing and wonderfully constructive things happen when people get this perspective which we sometimes call a testimony. It is the work of prophets and missionaries to carry this message so that it changes the hearts and road maps of all inhabitants of this world who will not harden their hearts.

Yet it is not always possible for missionaries, prophets, and even the constant and loving service of parents to help those hard cases where neuroses, character disorder, and psychoses are deeply rooted.

All can benefit from the sympathetic interest and love of another man or woman and from the administrations of the priesthood. But some of the people are so sorely afflicted that their problems can only be helped by “fasting and prayer!” and many require highly trained and skillful professional experts in rebuilding horribly distorted and damaged maps. Many will never be well until released from the damaged conditions created or inherited in this life, despite all church leaders and counselors can do. We have constant need of those who develop professional expertise in helping with these harder cases.

No particular school of thought in your world is preeminent in my experience. Effective professionals can come out of any number of disciplines and often the doctrine of a particular discipline merges into experience and thus becomes unique to that person. A great and wise bishop can often do more than a professionally trained person. Bishops can and do handle most of the problems brought to them. This should continue to be so. However, a professionally trained person who is humble and caring can often be of great assistance to a priesthood leader, and can provide help to suffering individuals which is not readily available even from a righteous priesthood leader.

I well remember an elder serving with us who would have the equivalent of a seizure at every zone conference as he was confronted with the example of great missionaries performing brilliantly which heightened his own anxiety and affirmed his low self-esteem. It took a counselor, a psychiatrist, a social worker, love from home, Sister Carmack teaching him how to read and overcome the effects of dyslexia and the power of the priesthood to see him through a mission. No one part of the puzzle was preeminent and any missing part would have resulted in failure. Added to all of that was fasting, prayer and faith.

A sister with a severe psychosis could not stand the rigors of a mission. Relief from its burdens and responsibilities could bring respite from pain. Professional help and ecclesiastical caring combined to help with that decision and a caring home was the peaceful setting needed for healing to begin. Perhaps she will never

be psychologically right until the Savior Himself takes her into his arms.

Again, C. S. Lewis captured the thought well: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world!" One can keep a proper perspective and avoid discouragement in working with people if one keeps in mind that death does not end life and that a great physician will sometimes have to complete work commenced here.

I have a few suggestions for your consideration as we humbly approach the task of assisting the Lord in bringing joy to people in place of sorrow and misery, in helping to bring to pass man's immortality and eternal life:

1. Build into people the ability to solve problems and meet life's challenges with courage and hope, knowing that a better life exists beyond the borders of this one.

Joseph F. Smith once said:

After we have done all we could do for the cause of truth, and withstood the evil that men have brought upon us, and we have been overwhelmed by their wrongs, it is still our duty to stand. We cannot give up; we must not lie down. Great causes are not won in a single generation. To stand firm in the face of overwhelming opposition, when you have done all you can, is the courage of faith. The courage of faith is the courage of progress. Men who possess that divine quality go on. They are not permitted to stand still if they would. They are not simply the creatures of their own power and wisdom; they are instrumentalities of a higher and divine purpose.

I think President Smith said it even better than Winston Churchill's famous speech to his school, Harrow, in which he had experienced so much pain and failure. He came back heroically as a great world leader and told the students eagerly waiting for the world famous orator, "Never give in; ... never never, never, never give in!" People need that message, and it seems more effective if a road map of hope is built into their program.

I saw a sister in Los Angeles Stake last June with whom I had spent many hours helping in a small way with a major psychosis when I served as Los Angeles Stake President. She was measurably

better than I remembered her being five years earlier. She had never stopped trying and many others had never given up on her.

2. *Be humble, which is easy in this business of working with people, and let us be wise enough not to put all of our eggs in one basket.* The Lord works through many agencies, and people, and wise priesthood leaders. While putting primary faith in the holy priesthood, know that fasting, prayer, therapy, proper use of drugs, medical help, psychology, and every available assist will sometimes be needed. Trained people should never succumb to the tendency to think they are wiser than everyone else, especially Church leaders assigned to help. A great attitude is one of humbly and professionally contributing as circumstances allow.

I don't know what I would have done without the medical and counseling assistance given the missionaries in my charge. On the other hand, I thank the Lord for the agency of the priesthood which was of primary help day in and day out. In the hard cases it was a combination of every kind of assistance we could find which finally opened the door.

3. *Let's remember that good homes and mature, loving parents are the salvation of our society and work toward building them.* Without them, civilization and mankind as we know them are doomed. This is the great problem of our age. Interestingly, the prophets saw this fact and launched extensive family help long before it became apparent that this would be our great need. How blessed we are to have prophets! Let us never be weary of following them, even when we know them as men with human weaknesses. And let us build parents and sound marriages and let us assist children to become mature adults and loving, wise parents. If we don't, the whole earth will be utterly wasted at His coming.

4. *Finally, let us build road maps of truth and reality, including in those road maps the content of life as it existed before we came here and after we leave.* Let us build hope in Christ, and a testimony of things as they are both by reason of our earthly senses and by reason of our spiritual senses.

I testify that life is eternal and that there is a gospel road map which will bring us home again. I applaud those of you who are

humbly striving to help people with their distorted and cruelly deficient road maps, which often they inherited as a consequence of being placed in disastrous homes by a loving God who valued an environment of freedom of choice in which difficult problem solving would build us. Most humbly, we are grateful that He sent His Son to accept our burdens and to give us hope and in due course freedom from pain, promising that special peace which passeth all understanding. In the end, as Corita Kent observed, "to believe in God is to believe that the rules are fair, and there will be wonderful surprises!" Without that assurance, this life would appear to promise only a continuation of unfairness and cruelty which seems to be a necessary part of the marvelous process of growth in this life.

Thank you for your crucial and enormously useful part in the road map to hope and the process of healing.