

“... However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely-appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform.”⁸

Families, like wards, vary in size and shape. Time moves on; one generation replaces another. Babies are born and mature to become parents and then grandparents. One family divides itself to become several. Wards grow and are divided. Where there was one, there are others.

Whatever happens in the world, whatever heights of civility or depths of depravity emerge in society, the plan remains unaltered. The Church will grow until it fills the whole earth. At once it will remain no bigger than the ward.

The Church provides activities and associations and ordinances and ordinations and covenants and contracts and corrections which prepare each of us for exaltation. It follows a pattern made in the heavens, for no mortal mind could have designed it.

Now and always hereafter, ordinary men will leave their teams standing in an unfinished furrow, the reins draped over the plow, when someone needs help. The women and children serve with them and will sustain them supplied with truth from the books of revelation, the gem of them all being the Book of Mormon, which testifies of Christ, of the Atone-

ment, of His Resurrection; and I testify of Him. Sheltered in the ward within the plan which He revealed, we with our families will be safe. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

- 1 Timothy 3:2.
- Doctrine and Covenants 58:18; italics added.
- Articles of Faith 1:5.
- “Think Not, When You Gather to Zion,” *Hymns* (1948), no. 21, vv. 1, 3.
- See Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28.
- Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders* (1998), 178.
- Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2*, 299.
- First Presidency letter, 11 Feb. 1999, cited in *Church News*, 27 Feb. 1999, 3.

The choir sang “He Died! The Great Redeemer Died.”

President Hinckley

Elder Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve, has just spoken to us. The choir has sung “He Died! The Great Redeemer Died.”

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Presidency of the Seventy.

Elder Marlin K. Jensen

Good morning, brothers and sisters.

Although, candidly, one is never completely comfortable with an assignment like this, I do sincerely appreciate the opportunity to speak to all of you on this beautiful Easter morning.

My wise father once told me that if I listened carefully to what people talk about from the pulpit in church, I would

know which principles of the gospel were of concern to them and those with which they might be struggling at any given time. Through the years my father’s observation has caused me to be very careful in the choice of subjects about which I speak! Nevertheless, I have an admission to make today. Since President Gordon B. Hinckley shared with us the

three fundamental needs every new member of the Church has for a friend, a responsibility, and nourishing by the good word of God, I have been personally concerned about my performance as a friend.

Friendship is a fundamental need

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of 'Mormonism.'" That thought ought to inspire and motivate all of us because I feel that friendship is a fundamental need of our world. I think in all of us there is a profound longing for friendship, a deep yearning for the satisfaction and security that close and lasting relationships can give. Perhaps one reason the scriptures make little specific mention of the principle of friendship is because it should be manifest quite naturally as we live the gospel. In fact, if the consummate Christian attribute of charity has a first cousin, it is friendship. To paraphrase the Apostle Paul slightly, friendship "suffereth long, and is kind; [friendship] envieth not; . . . seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; . . . [friendship] never faileth."²

Friendship starts at home

Like so much of what is worthwhile in life, our needs for friendship are often best met in the home. If our children feel friendship within the family, with each other, and with parents, they will not be desperate for acceptance outside the family. I think one of life's most satisfying accomplishments for my wife and me is to have lived long enough to see our children become good friends. It's definitely a miracle that those in our family who in younger years occasionally threatened one another with serious bodily harm now seek out and genuinely enjoy each other's friendship. Similarly, I think no finer compliment can be paid to parents

than to have children say that their parents are among their best friends.

Friendship is also a vital and wonderful part of courtship and marriage. A relationship between a man and a woman that begins with friendship and then ripens into romance and eventually marriage will usually become an enduring, eternal friendship. Nothing is more inspiring in today's world of easily dissolved marriages than to observe a husband and wife quietly appreciating and enjoying each other's friendship year in and year out as they experience together the blessings and trials of mortality. A recently published report on 25 years of landmark marital research finds that "the linchpin of a lasting marriage . . . is a simple concept with a profound impact: friendship."³ In a poignant letter written by the Prophet Joseph Smith to his wife, Emma, during the separations and tribulations of Missouri, he comforted her by saying, "Oh my affectionate Emma, I want you to remember that I am a true and faithful friend, to you and the children, forever."⁴

Church organization fosters friendship

The inspired organization of the Church also fosters friendships. From our youngest to our oldest years we are in settings where friendship and sociality can flourish. In interviews, meetings, classes, quorums, councils, activities, and a variety of other opportunities for association, we can make friends and find understanding. The salutation prescribed for greeting the elders attending the School of the Prophets in Kirtland expresses the spirit of friendship that might well serve as a creed for each of us: "I receive you to fellowship, in a determination that is fixed, immovable, and unchangeable, to be your friend . . . through the grace of God in the bonds of love."⁵

Friendship needed to serve, teach

All of our interactions in the Church are made more enjoyable and productive when they are accompanied by genuine feelings of friendship. A teacher of the gospel, for instance, who doesn't befriend his or her students will seldom teach with lasting influence and effect. I still treasure a one-sentence entry in my high school yearbook in which a seminary teacher I loved and from whom I learned much told me he was grateful to be my friend.

A bishop, no matter how skilled in administrative matters, must be a friend to children, youth, and adults if he is to help them reach their spiritual potential. I was touched once when a young woman I knew went to her bishop to confess a serious transgression. She had been worried about how the bishop might react to her deviation from the gospel path and had only gone to him after considerable urging. When I asked her afterward what his response had been, she told me with great emotion that her bishop had wept with her and that in working with him to gain the Lord's forgiveness, she now considered her bishop to be one of her best friends.

Reach out to others

There is a particular challenge we face as Latter-day Saints in establishing and maintaining friendships. Because our commitment to marriage, family, and the Church is so strong, we often feel challenged by constraints of time and energy in reaching out in friendship to others beyond that core group. I experienced this dilemma personally in recent days as I tried to steal a few moments at home to prepare this talk. Twice, friends from my past whom I love dearly but see only occasionally dropped in to visit. During what ought to have been choice times of reunion and reminiscence, I ironically found myself growing inwardly

impatient for the visits to end so that I could get back to writing my talk about friendship!

I have since felt ashamed. How selfish we can be. How unwilling to be inconvenienced, to give, to bless and be blessed. What kind of parents or neighbors or servants of the Lord Jesus Christ can we be without being a friend? In this information age, is not friendship still the best technology for sharing the truths and way of life we cherish? Is not our reluctance voluntarily to reach out to others in friendship a significant obstacle to helping God accomplish His eternal purposes?

Sincere friendship at core of fellowship

Years ago when I was serving as a bishop, a recently converted family moved into our rural Utah community. These good people had joined the Church in the eastern United States and had been warmly fellowshipped and put to work in a small branch there. When they came to our larger, more-established ward, they somehow slipped through the cracks. Some of the family members, particularly the father, became disenchanted with the Church and its members.

One Sunday morning when I noticed the father was missing from priesthood meeting, I left the meetinghouse and drove to his home. He invited me in, and we had a very honest conversation about the struggle he was having with his new faith and neighbors. After exploring various possibilities for responding to his concerns, none of which seemed to appeal to him very much, I asked him with a tone of frustration in my voice just what we could do to help him. I've never forgotten his reply:

"Well, bishop," he said (and I will need to paraphrase here slightly), "for heaven's sake, whatever you do, please don't assign me a *friend*."

I learned a great lesson that day. No one wants to become a "project"; we all

want spontaneously to be loved. And, if we are to have friends, we want them to be genuine and sincere, not "assigned."

Be a friend

Brothers and sisters, my message today is very simple: if we truly want to be tools in the hands of our Heavenly Father in bringing to pass His eternal purposes, we need only to be a friend. Consider the power of each one of us, 10 million strong, of our own free will and choice reaching out to those not yet of our faith in unconditional friendship. We would no longer be accused of offering warm bread and a cold shoulder. Imagine the consequences for good if each active family in the Church offered consistent concern and genuine friendship to a less-active family or a new-member family. The power is in each one of us to be a friend. Old and young, rich and poor, educated and humble, in every language and country, we all have the capacity to be a friend.

Our Savior, shortly before His Crucifixion, said to His disciples: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends."⁶ Having been so richly blessed by Christ's friendship, I pray that we will now be to others what He is to us: a true friend. At no time will we be more Christ-like than when we are a friend. I testify of the inestimable value of friends in my own

life and express my gratitude to all of them this morning. I know that when we offer ourselves in friendship, we make a most significant contribution to God's work and to the happiness and progress of His children. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 316.
2. 1 Corinthians 13:4-5, 8.
3. John Gottman, as cited in Karen S. Peterson, "Friendship Makes Marriages a Success," *USA Today*, 1 Apr. 1999, p. 1D.
4. Quoted in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. (1992), 3:1345.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 88:133.
6. John 15:13-14.

President Hinckley

Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Presidency of the Seventy has just spoken to us.

The choir and congregation will now sing "Jesus, Once of Humble Birth." Following the singing, Sister Sheri L. Dew, second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, will address us. She will be followed by Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang "Jesus, Once of Humble Birth."

Sister Sheri L. Dew

Christ offers salvation to all

In His last discourse to His disciples prior to Gethsemane and Calvary, the Savior declared that He was "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). On this beautiful Easter morning, I testify with the prophet Alma that "there is no other

way . . . whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ" (Alma 38:9).

The Savior's Atonement is stunningly inclusive! "For as in Adam *all* die, even so in Christ shall *all* be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22; italics added). Come one, come all, the Lord has invited. The gospel of Jesus Christ is for every man and