

## Elder Marlin K. Jensen

### Be humble

One of the memorable themes of last October's general conference was that in addition to being concerned about what we *do*, we Latter-day Saints ought also to pay attention to what we *are* and are striving to *become*.<sup>1</sup> With that principle in mind, I listened attentively last November to President Gordon B. Hinckley's address to the youth of the Church. I was touched by the six priceless bits of wisdom he shared describing what youth ought to *be*. One of the six—"be humble"—was of special interest to me.<sup>2</sup>

When I suggested to my wife several weeks ago that because of President Hinckley's talk I was considering humility as a possible topic for my remarks today, she paused and, with a twinkle in her eye, teasingly replied, "That leaves you only a few days to gain some!" Being thus encouraged, I have reflected on what might be involved in obeying President Hinckley's injunction to "be humble."

To begin, it should come as no surprise that, in the estimation of some, humility ranks quite low on the scale of desirable character traits. Popular books have been written in recent years on integrity, common sense, civility, and a host of other virtues, but apparently there is little market for humility. Obviously, in these coarsening times when we are taught the art of negotiating by intimidation, and *assertiveness* has become a byword of the business world, those seeking to become humble will be a small and overlooked but critically important minority.

Consciously trying to acquire humility is also problematic. I remember once hearing one of my colleagues in the Seventy say about humility that "if you think you have it, you don't." He suggested we should try to develop humility and be sure we didn't know when we got it, and then

we would have it. But if we ever thought we had it, we wouldn't.<sup>3</sup>

This is one of the lessons C. S. Lewis teaches in his well-known *Screwtape Letters*. In letter XIV, a good man who is being recruited by a devil and his apprentice to their side is growing humble, and the devil remarks that "this is very bad." With great insight, Lewis has the devil say to his associate, "Your patient has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact?"<sup>4</sup>

### How to develop humility

Fortunately the Savior has given us a model for developing humility. When His disciples approached Him and inquired, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He responded by placing a little child in their midst and stating, "Whosoever . . . shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."<sup>5</sup>

In this passage the Savior teaches us that to become humble is to become as a child. How does a person become as a child, and what are the childlike qualities we ought to develop? King Benjamin, in his profound Book of Mormon sermon, provides guidance:

"For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father."<sup>6</sup>

King Benjamin seems to teach that becoming like a child is a gradual process of spiritual development in which we are aided by the Holy Ghost and our reliance

on Christ's Atonement. Through this process, we will eventually acquire the childlike attributes of meekness, humility, patience, love, and spiritual submissiveness. True humility will inevitably lead us to say to God, "Thy will be done." And because what we *are* does affect what we *do*, our submissiveness will be reflected in our reverence, gratitude, and willingness to accept callings, counsel, and correction.

### Submissiveness is not subservience

A story contained in the family lore of Brigham Young's descendants illustrates the submissive nature of humility. It recounts that in a public meeting the Prophet Joseph, possibly as a test, sternly rebuked Brigham Young for something he had done or something he was supposed to have done but hadn't—the detail is unclear. When Joseph finished the rebuke, everyone in the room waited for Brigham Young's response. This powerful man, later known as the Lion of the Lord, in a voice everyone could tell was sincere, said simply and humbly, "Joseph, what do you want me to do?"<sup>7</sup>

The power of that response itself brings a feeling of humility. It reminds us that the greatest act of courage and love in the history of mankind—Christ's atoning sacrifice—was also the greatest act of humility and submissiveness. Some may wonder if those seeking to become humble must forever defer to the strongly held opinions and positions of others. Certainly the Savior's life evidences that true humility is anything but subservience, weakness, or servility.

### Pride—the antithesis of humility

Another helpful perspective on humility can be obtained by examining its antithesis—pride. Just as humility leads to other virtues such as modesty, teachableness, and unpretentiousness, pride leads to many other vices. In Latter-day

Saint theology, it was through pride that Satan became the adversary of all truth. It was the growth of this arrogance, termed *hubris*, that the wise men of ancient Greece portrayed as the sure road to destruction.

Twelve years ago President Ezra Taft Benson delivered a powerful conference address declaring that pride is "the universal sin, the great vice."<sup>8</sup> He taught that pride is essentially competitive in nature and made reference to this quote from C. S. Lewis:

"Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If every one else became equally rich, clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone."<sup>9</sup>

What an interesting commentary on today's highly competitive and thus prideful world. What an important reminder as well, for those of us who are blessed with the fulness of the gospel, to avoid both the condition and appearance of haughtiness or condescension in all of our human relationships.

### How humility would change the world

I think sometimes of what life would be like if we all possessed greater humility.

Imagine a world in which *we* would replace *I* as the dominant pronoun.

Think of the impact on the pursuit of knowledge if being learned without being arrogant were the norm.

Consider the climate that would exist within in a marriage or family—or any organization, for that matter—if through genuine humility mistakes were freely admitted and forgiven, if we were not

afraid to praise others for fear they might gain on us, and if all were able to listen as well as we now verbalize.

Contemplate the advantages of life in a society in which considerations of status were only secondary, where citizens were more concerned with their responsibilities than their rights, and where those in authority might even occasionally step forward and humbly acknowledge, "I could be wrong." Must our need to be "right" be so all-consuming? Surely this intolerance of others and their viewpoints is nothing less than the hubris the Greeks viewed and warned against as the suicidal sin. One wonders how differently even recent world history might be written if its principal participants had yielded to the gentle nudgings of humility.

Even more importantly, think of the role of humility in the process of repentance. Is it not humility, coupled with faith in Christ, that carries the transgressor to God in prayer, to the offended party in apology, and, where necessary, to his or her priesthood leader in confession?

### Examples of humility

I am grateful for examples of humility I have encountered in my life.

Once my father, in the heat and frustration of a humid July afternoon, overreacted to my youthful farming blunders and administered punishment which I felt was in excess of the crime. Later he approached me with an apology and a much-appreciated expression of confidence in my abilities. That humble expression has remained in my memory for more than 40 years.

I have seen a constant humility in my wonderful wife. Like Nephi turning to Lehi for direction after Lehi had momentarily faltered, she has stayed at my side for 34 years and consistently supported and loved me "notwithstanding my weakness."<sup>10</sup>

I am often deeply moved by evidences of humility in the scriptures. Con-

sider John the Baptist declaring of the Savior, "He must increase, but I must decrease."<sup>11</sup> Think of Moroni pleading with us not to condemn him because of his imperfections, but to thank God that He made Moroni's imperfections manifest so that we can learn to be wiser than Moroni was.<sup>12</sup> Nor should we forget the exclamation of Moses, who, after experiencing the greatness of God and His creations, acknowledged that "for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed."<sup>13</sup> Is not Moses' recognition of our complete dependence on God the beginning of true humility?

### "To walk humbly with thy God"

I resonate to the English author John Ruskin's memorable statement that "the first test of a truly great man is his humility." He continued:

"I do not mean, by humility, doubt of his own power. . . . [But really] great men . . . have a curious . . . feeling that . . . greatness is not *in* them, but *through* them. . . . And they see something Divine . . . in every other man . . . and are endlessly, foolishly, incredibly merciful."<sup>14</sup>

The Old Testament prophet Micah, like our living prophet, President Hinckley, was concerned about nurturing the development of humility. To his people he said, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"<sup>15</sup>

God bless us all to walk humbly with Him and with all men. I testify that President Gordon B. Hinckley is a true prophet and that his counsel to "be humble" comes from God. I testify that Jesus Christ, God's meek and lowly Son, personifies humility. I know that it will be in humility that we one day kneel at the Savior's feet to be judged of Him.<sup>16</sup> May we live our lives to prepare for that humble moment is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## NOTES

1. See Neal A. Maxwell, in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 48; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 37; Dallin H. Oaks, in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 40–43; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32–33; Russell M. Nelson, in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 19; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 17.
2. “A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” *Ensign*, Jan. 2001, 4, 10.
3. Albert Choules Jr., unpublished minutes of Seventy Quorum’s meeting, 15 Apr. 1993.
4. *The Screwtape Letters* (1982), 62–63.
5. Matthew 18:1, 4.
6. Mosiah 3:19.
7. Quoted in Truman G. Madsen, “Hugh B. Brown—Youthful Veteran,” *New Era*, Apr. 1976, 16.
8. In Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 6; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 6.
9. *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. (1960), 95.
10. 2 Nephi 33:11.
11. John 3:30.
12. See Mormon 9:31.
13. Moses 1:10.
14. *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (1903–12), 5:331.
15. Micah 6:8.
16. See Mosiah 27:31; D&C 88:104.

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The choir and congregation sang  
“Come, Come, Ye Saints.”

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## Sister Sydney S. Reynolds

### A God of miracles

With Moroni of old, I believe in a God of miracles. Moroni wrote to the people of our dispensation, “Behold, I will show unto you a God of miracles, . . . and it is that same God who created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are” (Mormon 9:11). Moroni proclaimed that Jesus Christ did many mighty miracles, that many mighty miracles were wrought by the hands of the Apostles, and that a God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever must be a God of miracles today (see Mormon 9:9, 18–19).

### Mighty miracles

Think of the miracles of the Old Testament. Remember Moses and the parting of the Red Sea. For all future generations of Israelites, the great miracles that led to their deliverance from Egypt provided undeniable proof of God’s existence and His love for them.

Many Book of Mormon prophets, including Nephi, pointed to the story of Moses to encourage faith and belief in a God who could deliver His people in their distress (see 1 Nephi 4:1–3). Other Book of Mormon prophets reminded the people that they themselves had witnessed miracles that should convince them of God’s power.

In the New Testament, the Apostle John shared his reason for recording many of the Savior’s miracles—namely, “that [we] might believe that Jesus is the Christ” (John 20:31).

In this dispensation we witness the great miracle of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth. It began when a young boy entered a grove of trees near Palmyra, New York, and poured out his heart and his questions to a God he believed could answer him—the God of miracles. And miracles have followed in this dispensation—mighty miracles—including the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, which is itself another testament of Jesus Christ.