

over all, and forever ascended to the right hand of God” (*The Mediation and Atonement* [1882], 151).

One of my favorites, from President Spencer W. Kimball:

“To the testimonies of these mighty men and apostles of old—our brethren in the ministry of the same Master—I add my own testimony. I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.

“He is my friend, my Savior, my Lord, my God.

“With all my heart I pray that the Saints may . . . gain an eternal inheritance with him in celestial glory” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1978, 110; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 73).

Our prophet today, President Gordon B. Hinckley, continues to lead us with his powerful convictions, as he declared in a recent stake conference address:

“I have a testimony, real, burning, and vital, of the truth of this work. I know that God our Eternal Father lives and that Jesus is the Christ, my Savior and my Redeemer. It is He who stands at the head of this Church. All I desire is that I go forward with this work as He would have it go

forward” (“Inspirational Thoughts,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2003, 5).

Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith

Summarizing the testimonies of all the ancient and modern-day apostles and prophets are the immortal words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who declared:

“And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

“For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father” (D&C 76:22–23).

I wish to add my own humble affirmation of the truthfulness of the aforementioned testimonies. I know that our Heavenly Father is literally the Father of our spirits and that Jesus Christ is our Savior, our Redeemer, our Lord, and, as we obey His commandments, our friend (see John 15:14). As we study the scriptures, may we have added insights into and greater appreciation for the power of testimony, especially as it is borne by those of great wisdom and advanced age, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder David A. Bednar

The tender mercies of the Lord

Six months ago I stood at this pulpit for the first time as the newest member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Both then and even more so now, I have felt and feel the weight of the call to serve and of the responsibility to teach with clarity and to testify with authority. I pray for and invite the assistance of the Holy Ghost as I now speak with you.

This afternoon I want to describe and discuss a spiritual impression I received a few moments before I stepped to this pulpit during the Sunday morning session of

general conference last October. Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf had just finished speaking and had declared his powerful witness of the Savior. Then we all stood together to sing the intermediate hymn that previously had been announced by President Gordon B. Hinckley. The intermediate hymn that morning was “Redeemer of Israel” (*Hymns*, no. 6).

Now, the music for the various conference sessions had been determined many weeks before—and obviously long before my new call to serve. If, however, I had been invited to suggest an intermediate hymn for that particular session of the con-

ference—a hymn that would have been both edifying and spiritually soothing for me and for the congregation before my first address in this Conference Center—I would have selected my favorite hymn, “Redeemer of Israel.” Tears filled my eyes as I stood with you to sing that stirring hymn of the Restoration.

Near the conclusion of the singing, to my mind came this verse from the Book of Mormon: “But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20).

My mind was drawn immediately to Nephi’s phrase “the tender mercies of the Lord,” and I knew in that very moment I was experiencing just such a tender mercy. A loving Savior was sending me a most personal and timely message of comfort and reassurance through a hymn selected weeks previously. Some may count this experience as simply a nice coincidence, but I testify that the tender mercies of the Lord are real and that they do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Often the Lord’s timing of His tender mercies helps us to both discern and acknowledge them.

What are the tender mercies of the Lord?

Since last October I have reflected repeatedly upon the phrase “the tender mercies of the Lord.” Through personal study, observation, pondering, and prayer, I believe I have come to better understand that the Lord’s tender mercies are the very personal and individualized blessings, strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindness, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts which we receive from and because of and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly the Lord suits “his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men” (D&C 46:15).

Recall how the Savior instructed His Apostles that He would not leave them

comfortless. Not only would He send “another Comforter” (John 14:16), even the Holy Ghost, but the Savior said that He would come to them (see John 14:18). Let me suggest that one of the ways whereby the Savior comes to each of us is through His abundant and tender mercies. For instance, as you and I face challenges and tests in our lives, the gift of faith and an appropriate sense of personal confidence that reaches beyond our own capacity are two examples of the tender mercies of the Lord. Repentance and forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience are examples of the tender mercies of the Lord. And the persistence and the fortitude that enable us to press forward with cheerfulness through physical limitations and spiritual difficulties are examples of the tender mercies of the Lord.

A sister feels the Lord’s tender mercies

In a recent stake conference, the tender mercies of the Lord were evident in the touching testimony of a young wife and mother of four whose husband was slain in Iraq in December of 2003. This stalwart sister recounted how, after being notified of her husband’s death, she received his Christmas card and message. In the midst of the abrupt reality of a dramatically altered life came to this good sister a timely and tender reminder that indeed families can be together forever. With permission I quote from that Christmas card:

“To the best family in the world! Have a great time together and remember the true meaning of Christmas! The Lord has made it possible for us to be together forever. So even when we are apart, we will still be together as a family.

“God bless and keep y’all safe and grant this Christmas to be our gift of love from us to Him above!!!

“All my love, Daddy and your loving husband!”

Clearly, the husband’s reference to being apart in his Christmas greeting referred

to the separation caused by his military assignment. But to this sister, as a voice from the dust from a departed eternal companion and father, came a most needed spiritual reassurance and witness. As I indicated earlier, the Lord's tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Faithfulness, obedience, and humility invite tender mercies into our lives, and it is often the Lord's timing that enables us to recognize and treasure these important blessings.

Receiving tender mercies through a leader

Some time ago I spoke with a priesthood leader who was prompted to memorize the names of all of the youth ages 13 to 21 in his stake. Using snapshots of the young men and women, he created flash cards that he reviewed while traveling on business and at other times. This priesthood leader quickly learned all the names of the youth.

One night the priesthood leader had a dream about one of the young men whom he knew only from a picture. In the dream he saw the young man dressed in a white shirt and wearing a missionary name tag. With a companion seated at his side, the young man was teaching a family. The young man held the Book of Mormon in his hand, and he looked as if he were testifying of the truthfulness of the book. The priesthood leader then awoke from his dream.

At an ensuing priesthood gathering, the leader approached the young man he had seen in his dream and asked to talk with him for a few minutes. After a brief introduction, the leader called the young man by name and said:

"I am not a dreamer. I have never had a dream about a single member of this stake, except for you. I am going to tell you about my dream, and then I would like you to help me understand what it means."

The priesthood leader recounted the dream and asked the young man about its

meaning. Choking with emotion, the young man simply replied, "It means God knows who I am." The remainder of the conversation between this young man and his priesthood leader was most meaningful, and they agreed to meet and counsel together from time to time during the following months.

That young man received the Lord's tender mercies through an inspired priesthood leader. I repeat again, the Lord's tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Faithfulness and obedience enable us to receive these important gifts and, frequently, the Lord's timing helps us to recognize them.

Tender mercies fortify and protect us

We should not underestimate or overlook the power of the Lord's tender mercies. The simpleness, the sweetness, and the constancy of the tender mercies of the Lord will do much to fortify and protect us in the troubled times in which we do now and will yet live. When words cannot provide the solace we need or express the joy we feel, when it is simply futile to attempt to explain that which is unexplainable, when logic and reason cannot yield adequate understanding about the injustices and inequities of life, when mortal experience and evaluation are insufficient to produce a desired outcome, and when it seems that perhaps we are so totally alone, truly we are blessed by the tender mercies of the Lord and made mighty even unto the power of deliverance (see 1 Nephi 1:20).

Who are they whom the Lord has chosen to receive His tender mercies?

Our hearts determine whether we are chosen

The word *chosen* in 1 Nephi 1:20 is central to understanding the concept of the Lord's tender mercies. The dictionary indicates that *chosen* suggests one who is selected, taken by preference, or picked out. It also can be used to refer to the elect or

chosen of God (see *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, second ed. [1989], “Chosen”).

Some individuals who hear or read this message erroneously may discount or dismiss in their personal lives the availability of the tender mercies of the Lord, believing that “I certainly am not one who has been or ever will be chosen.” We may falsely think that such blessings and gifts are reserved for other people who appear to be more righteous or who serve in visible Church callings. I testify that the tender mercies of the Lord are available to all of us and that the Redeemer of Israel is eager to bestow such gifts upon us.

To be or to become chosen is not an exclusive status conferred upon us. Rather, you and I ultimately determine if we are chosen. Please now note the use of the word *chosen* in the following verses from the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Behold, there are many called, but few are *chosen*. And why are they not *chosen*?”

“Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men” (D&C 121:34–35; italics added).

I believe the implication of these verses is quite straightforward. God does not have a list of favorites to which we must hope our names will someday be added. He does not limit “the chosen” to a restricted few. Rather, it is *our* hearts and *our* aspirations and *our* obedience which definitively determine whether we are counted as one of God’s chosen.

Enoch was instructed by the Lord on this very point of doctrine. Please note the use of the word *choose* in these verses:

“Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency;

“And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they

should *choose* me, their Father” (Moses 7:32–33; italics added).

As we learn in these scriptures, the fundamental purposes for the gift of agency were to love one another and to choose God. Thus we become God’s chosen and invite His tender mercies as we use our agency to choose God.

The Father’s work—and our work

One of the most well-known and frequently cited passages of scripture is found in Moses 1:39. This verse clearly and concisely describes the work of the Eternal Father: “For behold, this is *my work* and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (italics added).

A companion scripture found in the Doctrine and Covenants describes with equal clarity and conciseness our primary work as the sons and daughters of the Eternal Father. Interestingly, this verse does not seem to be as well known and is not quoted with great frequency. “Behold, this is *your work*, to keep my commandments, yea, with all your might, mind and strength” (D&C 11:20; italics added).

Thus, the Father’s work is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of His children. Our work is to keep His commandments with all of our might, mind, and strength—and we thereby become chosen and, through the Holy Ghost, receive and recognize the tender mercies of the Lord in our daily lives.

Conference is a tender mercy

The very conference in which we are participating this weekend is yet another example of the Lord’s tender mercies. We have been blessed to receive inspired counsel from the leaders of the Savior’s Church—timely counsel for our day and for our circumstances and for our challenges. We have been instructed, lifted, edified, called to repentance, and strengthened. The spirit of this conference has fortified our faith

and fueled our desire to repent, to obey, to improve, and to serve. Like you, I am eager to now act upon the reminders, counsel, and personal inspiration with which we have been blessed during this conference. And in just a few moments each of us will receive one of the Lord's tender mercies as we hear the concluding remarks and testimony of President Gordon B. Hinckley. Truly "the Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Psalm 145:9).

Tender mercies are available to all

I am thankful for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith and for the knowledge we have today about the Lord's tender mercies. Our desires, faithfulness, and obedience invite and help us to discern His mercies in our lives. As one of His servants, I declare my witness that Jesus is the Christ, our Redeemer and our Savior. I know that He lives and that His tender mercies are available to all of us. Each of us can have eyes to see clearly and ears

to hear distinctly the tender mercies of the Lord as they strengthen and assist us in these latter days. May our hearts always be filled with gratitude for His abundant and tender mercies. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Thank you, brethren. Brothers and sisters, as we conclude the conference, we express appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir, the combined choir from the Ogden and Logan Utah Institutes, and the priesthood choir from Brigham Young University for the beautiful and inspiring music. We also extend our thanks to all who participated in any of these proceedings.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker at this session, and following President Hinckley's remarks, the choir will favor us with "Sing We Now at Parting." The benediction will be offered by Elder William W. Parmley of the Seventy, and this conference will then be adjourned for six months.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Strengthened faith and testimonies

My beloved brethren and sisters, we have had a wonderful conference. The Spirit of the Lord has been with us. We have been taught many truths. Our testimonies have been strengthened, our faith quickened.

Through the miracle—and it is a miracle—of modern technology, these proceedings have been broadcast worldwide. Ninety-five percent of the membership of the Church in all the world could have participated with us.

It has been a time for the renewal of our faith in the great eternal verities which have come to us through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph. How blessed we

are. How fortunate we are in our knowledge of these transcendent truths.

Reach out with love and concern

But may I say, as I have said in the past, our membership in this Church, with eligibility for all of the blessings that flow therefrom, should never be any cause for self-righteousness, for arrogance, for denigration of others, for looking down upon others. All mankind is our neighbor. When asked which was the greatest commandment of the law, the Lord said:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . . .