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To the Fathers

I have a brief message to the fathers. First, I want to thank my father and Ana's father for teaching us the gospel when we were young. I know many of you also have excellent fathers. A father's role is difficult to overstate, because its influence is felt even many years after one has left the paternal home. To this day, in my mind I can see my father doing certain things in certain ways and he still influences me for good.

Second, I want to encourage all of you here who are fathers to become righteous or continue in righteous paths. God wants us to be righteous husbands and fathers. Prophets and apostles have warned us and continue to warn us that:

Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and *spiritual* needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations ("The Family—A Proclamation to the World", emphasis added).

Aren't we blessed to know these things are true? We can learn truth in God's way—by the preaching of prophets and apostles and by the power of the Holy Ghost. We don't have to wait for science or other experts to validate the words of the prophets, though many have. Fathers have an important role, and they will be held accountable "to rear their children in love *and* righteousness".

May I offer three suggestions to fathers for making their homes places of love and righteousness?

1. Love and respect your wife.

Nothing will bring more peace to your home than this. Your love and respect for your wife will increase the more you serve her and think about her needs. You should pray for her every day, for her well-being, for her happiness, for your role in her life to be an influence for good.

2. Love and respect your children

Treat your children not as small people who don't know anything. Treat them with the dignity of who they will become. This doesn't mean that they know everything that's best for them—they don't. They need guidance, training, discipline, love, compassion. Teach your children to work hard, teach your children the gospel by praying with them, reading scriptures with them, and being for them the kind of parent Christ would be. This is not an indulgent parent—a parent who caters to every whim of a child is crippling the child's ability to be independent. Likewise, this is not a parent who gives no guidance or minimal guidance to their children.

The Lord has always taught his people that they need to teach their children the gospel. Here's King Benjamin, for example:

Ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil... But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another (Mosiah 4:14–15).

There are lessons that children will not learn unless they are taught by a loving parent. The mysteries of God are not given to the world by experience alone. Experience is a hard teacher, but for all its hardness

it will not teach a child to be kind, nor will it teach a child to love and serve God or his fellow man.

3. Honor the calling and priesthood the Lord has given you

If you give generously to the Lord, He will give generously to you. He will make up for what you have sacrificed from yourself and then give so much more. If you withhold from the Lord, you are not making the sacrifice necessary for exaltation that others have made and you are not honoring your covenants. We all have room to improve on this one, myself included.

And when you serve, serve for the right reasons. I can testify that the men who sit here behind me serve you because they love the Lord and want to serve him (and they know that when they serve you, they are serving him). I remind all of us of what Nephi taught: "The laborer in Zion shall labor *for* Zion; for if they labor for money [or any other self-serving motive] they shall perish" (2 Nephi 26:31).

Taking Offense

And now I change topics. Ostensibly, I'm going to talk about a variety of things here, but I want you to listen as if I were talking about marriage, because these principles apply here. If you're not married, please just listen actively, not worrying about any undercurrents you may feel.

This bishopric has sometimes remarked at how many people we've offended over the last few years. We're keeping a list of course, to make sure that nobody feels left out. We're now to the point where those we've offended is a much larger number than those we've not offended. My remarks today are directed to you 14 remaining people.

Joking aside, taking offense at something that happens in the Church, or in the neighborhood, or especially in our families has important, often long-lasting, and always unhappy consequences. Elder Bednar said during the October 2006 General Conference:

It ultimately is impossible for another person to offend you or to offend me. Indeed, believing that another person offended us is fundamentally false. To be offended is a choice we make; it is not a condition inflicted or imposed upon us by someone or something else (David A. Bednar, "And Nothing Shall Offend Them", *Ensign*, November 2006).

May I add that to take offense is like a self-inflicted wound. We are literally choking ourselves spiritually when we take offense at something someone else says or does and harbor resentment or anger. The Spirit of the Lord cannot guide us in wisdom's paths when we make that choice. If left alone, resentment and anger fester and make us bitter. And bitterness leads to doubt, selfishness, and (probably) ingrown toenails.

The Way of the World

I'm really not talking only about taking offense now. I'm talking about all kinds of spiritual maladies that afflict this ward. As we talk of these principles, we recognize that all of us fall short in some way. Please let us not judge one another.

We have among us many who take offense at others on a regular basis, whether offense was intended or not. Some blame everyone else but themselves for their own problems. We have among us those who struggle with drug dependencies, be it alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, or any other substance that robs us of our agency. We have those among us who indulge in pornography, or who struggle with same-sex attraction. There are some who lie to cover up their sins. Some do not do their home teaching. Some are selfish, thoughtless, and unkind. Some who use foul language, who have evil thoughts, who are angry. Some spend more money than they make, living beyond their means in covetousness. There are some who refuse to forgive. There are some who are slothful, who will not pray or who will not search the

scriptures. There are some who accept callings but then do not serve faithfully, but rather minimally. There are some who do not keep the Sabbath day holy, but rather make it profane by inviting all kinds of worldliness into their homes.

While the world has some good ideas on how to solve some of these problems, they usually center around helping the individual learn to cope with their weakness, rather than overcome them. I won't address any of those solutions today, because there is one sure way to overcome them all.

Christ's Way

Please listen as I offer an alternative way: Christ's way. I'll note first that Christ's way is truly better for two reasons. The first is that it genuinely works every time and when done consistently over time, it will change your very nature that you will have no more disposition to do evil of any sort. The second reason Christ's way is better is that it carries with it distinct spiritual gifts and is an essential component for salvation.

People who go through life just "putting up" with their own weakness or inclination to sin, feeling sorry but never repenting fully, hating what they do, but never turning themselves over to Christ to become a new creature, are not included in that group who have overcome the world through Christ because, though they have lived patiently, they have not lived by faith.

We read the description of those who inherit the celestial kingdom in Doctrine & Covenants, section 76:

That by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power; And who *overcome by faith*, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true (D&C 76:51–53, emphasis added).

To "overcome by faith" is very different from living patiently until death.

Christ's way for us to overcome can be found throughout the scriptures, but I've found this passage in some of the final words of Moroni to be succinct:

Behold, I say unto you that whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father in the name of Christ it shall be granted him; and this promise is unto *all*, even unto the ends of the earth.

O then despise not, and wonder not, but hearken unto the words of the Lord, and ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him (Mormon 9:21,27, emphasis added).

Once a person has repented sincerely, the Lord forgives him. In fact, to those who fully repent is promised a "remission of their sins". To "remit" is to cancel a debt owed or a punishment deserved or to pardon. The Lord erases the balance in his book, and you owe nothing more for your sins. This is a clean heart and pure hands, a spiritual renewal, being born again.

But for some of us who have a particular weakness, an addiction, a propensity to sin in some way—any of these things—though we have a new heart, we live in fear of falling again, of succumbing once more to the temptation that has tripped us so often before. We repent sincerely, we feel forgiven and feel changed, but when the moon is right, or whatever situation occurs, and the temptation comes, we fall.

The Apostle Paul described some condition called a "thorn in the flesh," (2 Corinthians 12:7–10) some

personal weakness or infirmity. Some of us have also a thorn in our flesh, something that causes us to stumble on a regular basis. We've asked the Lord a thousand times to have it removed, but it is still there, causing us to fall despite our best efforts. We cry in our hearts, "Why, Lord, oh why will you not take this thing away from me? Can this cycle ever be broken?" and the answer is the same for us, as it was for Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." What does that mean?

Overcoming Temptation

We now come to the heart of the matter. I once thought that there were things in this life that could not be overcome. I had hope that the Lord would understand in the end, and that at judgement day, he'd simply give me an understanding nod and let me in. I no longer believe that.

For one, it's not scriptural. I could find no justification in the scriptures to sin, even for those who are simply "born that way" or who have great weakness and face incredible temptation for biological, social, or psychological reasons. The scriptures repeat that "no unclean thing can dwell with God" (1 Nephi 10:21).

Secondly, I learned something about what the Lord can do, that I hadn't thought about before. I now believe firmly that there is nothing in this life that cannot be overcome through Christ. "I can do *all* things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). See also 2 Nephi 1:10; Jacob 1:15; Mosiah 3:9; Mosiah 4:21; Mosiah 22:16; Ether 12:3; Moroni 7:25, 26.

Meeting Each Temptation with Faith

Christ's atonement changes our hearts. Nearly all of you know this by personal experience. But there's something else that Christ can do besides give us a mighty change of heart and a remission of our sins. He has the power also to help us *retain* a remission of our sins—to stay clean and pure and to resist temptation of all kinds, indefinitely, until the end of our lives.

When we have a changed heart, we no longer desire evil, but Satan doesn't quit on us. He will continue to try to tempt us, and sometimes we fall, and sometimes we fall in the same place we've fallen before. This wasn't because our conversion wasn't real or complete, but we are missing a vital piece in our armor that Satan has exploited.

A picture of this chink in the armor, as well as hope for its repair, is described in 1 Corinthians 10:

"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:12–13).

Two Words

The "way to escape" Paul talks about is contained in these two words: watch and pray. Christ taught the Nephites "watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation" (3 Nephi 18:18). This was taught to his disciples at his coming then immediately repeated to everyone else who was there.

King Benjamin reminds us to "watch [ourselves], [our] thoughts, and [our] words, and [our] deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what [we] have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of [our] lives," otherwise, he says, "ye must perish" (Mosiah 4:30).

To be watchful is to remember that Satan is out there and hates our guts. He loves to see us give in to temptation, especially old temptations because they not only cause us to sin, but they make us think

we're worthless, good-for-nothings. Our vigilance, however, is kept up through earnest, constant prayer. Searching God's word will also give us knowledge of impending temptation. Keep the Holy Ghost close to you, and you will always be warned.

But now here comes the temptation! Can we escape it? We can escape every temptation. Every one! But we must ask the Lord to help us do it for those temptations we know are bigger than we are, and there are many such waves in the ocean. We soon learn to recognize them by experience. When one of these waves is coming, plead with God to help you resist and to remove the temptation from you. He will come to your aid. He can come to your aid because he is all-powerful and he knows precisely what you're going through:

"He will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12).

Christ wants us to overcome, he's on our side. He wants us to access his grace in the very moment we feel tempted, and not wait until we've given in to ask for forgiveness. Tell him in the moment of your temptation, "Dear Lord, I'm being tempted again, but I don't want to give in. I know you can help me. Please strengthen me and please help me resist this evil. If it is more than I can stand, please take it away from me."

But we don't just pray once. We pray until the temptation has been overcome. Every time. This works for children, youth, and adults.

One example of this when Moses faced Satan directly. "Satan cried with a loud voice" and made a big scene that frightened Moses. But Moses remembered to call upon God, and "he received strength, and he commanded, saying: Depart from me, Satan, for this one God only will I worship" (Moses 1:18–25). Moses called upon God again and again during this one encounter with Satan. We also see an example of it when Alma fought with Amlici. As they fought "face to face":

Alma, being a man of God, being exercised with much faith, cried, saying: O Lord, have mercy and spare my life, that I may be an instrument in thy hands to save and preserve this people. Now when Alma had said these words he contended again with Amlici; and he was strengthened, insomuch that he slew Amlici with the sword (Alma 2:29–31).

When we recognize our foe, that is the time to pray for strength, to pray for deliverance. King Hezekiah taught this to Israel: "With [the king of Assyria] is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chr. 32:8). God literally will send angels to help us and to fight in our stead when our foe is greater. An example of this is found in 2 Kings:

And when the servant of [Elisha] was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And [Elisha] answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha (2 Kings 6:15–17).

The Lord really will fight our battles. This isn't to say we stand by idly doing nothing. We fight as well, but we recognize that only when we have asked the Lord to win the battle for us, will we win every time.

The bottom line is, while we may have a weakness, a propensity to sin in some way, an addiction of some kind, strong as it may be, God can deliver us daily from each individual temptation. And even with a new heart and a new nature, we may yet be tempted, but with faith in Christ overcome each

temptation as it appears. It will certainly take diligence on our part; we must show the Lord we want to be righteous more than we want to sin.

Now I share with you the connection between faith and prayer, if you haven't already made it. Faith is prayer. Prayer is how we manifest our faith to God. When we cease to pray, we are relying on our own strength. But when we pray and "do all things that lie in our power; ... then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed" (D&C 123:17).

As it relates to our marriages, again, for those who are married, please realize that there is no problem the Lord cannot solve, no broken thing that he cannot mend. When two people are willing to set aside their pride and do what the Lord asks them to do, the Lord will work a miracle and make the thing done. Whatever he lays His hand on will live, but His hand moves on our behalf by our faith. We ask the Lord specifically to help us love each other, to stop being selfish, to be kinder and more attentive, to remember things that are important to our spouse.

Getting Serious

Let's get serious about our salvation, brothers and sisters. We can do it! I'm telling you that God loves you and knows you better than you know yourself. He knows that you can be so much more than you are here in this world. Let us realize a higher potential, my dear brothers and sisters. Let us give ourselves to the Lord and let him make us into nobler and better beings.

I want to tell you that I know that this book, the Book of Mormon, is of divine origin, as is the Bible. I believe them both with all my heart and turn to them to show me the right way. I'm thankful to God that they both point in the same direction, and that direction is the path that Christ walked. He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The only name under heaven whereby we can be saved (Mosiah 3:17).

Keys of the Priesthood

I also want you to know that the keys of the priesthood are real, and with them come very real spiritual gifts. Gifts of discernment, order, compassion, strength, patience, revelation. Whomever is called to fill the shoes of this bishop, as this man has filled the shoes of those who have gone before him, whomever is called will have the same keys and the same right of presidency. It is to those keys, to that priesthood that we owe respect, for God has given those keys to the Church in order that we can have someone living commanded and authorized to show us the right path.

President Hinckley holds *all* those keys now, along with the apostles. The phrase "follow the brethren" is a soft way of saying, "you'd better be very careful about taking lightly the words of those who have been anointed by Christ to lead us." When Christ or his apostle says, "quickly step to your left" our reaction should be to step to the left, though the world may laugh at us, or say that we're obeying blindly.

Those whose lives are in alignment with God's principles of happiness will have confirmed to them all of his words by the power of the Holy Ghost. I'd hardly call that blind obedience. Afterward, we may have time for reflection to try to understand why God works the way he does, but often not. In any case, God restored the priesthood one final time to show his children the path that Christ walked, and that is the path of obedience, service, and love.

May we rely wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save (2 Nephi 31:19), and trust no more in our own arm for salvation (2 Nephi 4:34).