

LDS Business College Devotional
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“Change Others by Changing Self”
by
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Well, Brothers and Sisters, it's really nice to be here with you. I don't know whether I should speak Portuguese or not, because when I first entered, someone came in and *como estou falando Portugues com a gente entao eu continuarei falando?* But we'll speak English for the rest of us here today, because I notice there are other people who don't speak Portuguese. So we'll move on with that.

It's really a delight to be here with you. It's a delight to be with young people in general. How I wish I were a young person again, but I still have youth in my bones, and so that still makes it good.

I'd like to talk about something I've been contemplating. I read an article in the April, 2006 *Ensign* written by a lady named Nancy May. (By the way, I'm going to talk about various subjects here, so if you can sort of follow the bouncing ball you'll be okay. You may take notes if you wish.) Her name is Nancy May, and she made this comment: "I had faith that our family could be blessed if I worked on improving myself instead of those around me." (Nancy May, "Our Journey to the Temple," *Ensign*, April 2006). That is a very profound concept. The more I work on improving myself, I, by accident, influence another person. That is the principle. It's a very important principle. We get tripped up on the idea that we can control someone. We can control the circumstances. If I just comb my hair this way, he'll like me. If I just smile this way, I can get a date with her. And somehow we think we're in control of certain circumstances.

An example of that is an engineer who is involved in constructing a bridge or a building, or a doctor who controls the surgical procedure and has a good outcome. The engineer, or the doctor, or you, or I may conclude, "I was in control of the outcome."

How many of us have ever had unexpected events happen in our lives on the worst possible day? How many of us have gotten a cold on the day of our biggest final exam

and we can't even see the paper? How many of us have had a flat tire when we're going to an interview? We're all dressed up in our suit or our dress and everything—flat tire, out in the snow and in the mud. No? Well, you haven't lived if you haven't had those experiences. In one of his first messages, Elder [David A.] Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve made a very profound statement. He said, "Perhaps one of life's ultimate lessons is that control is an illusion." That is really profound!

We think we can control things. We can control procedure; we can control our agenda. We control our plans. We can actually control somewhat, Ladies, Sisters, our hair. Sometimes it frizzes up and sometimes it doesn't. But it's an illusion, and that's what Elder Bednar is saying. That is a pretty strong concept. Therefore, we really are not in control. We are especially not in control of another person or another person's reaction to us.

Many of you, very likely, are not yet married. There is the illusion that, "If I just did X, Y and Z, he'd like me," etc. It is the same for the young men. It's an illusion. Now, let me talk about the hard side of that, if that isn't hard enough. The hard side of it is many people, because of the serendipitous nature of life, are tempted to conclude, "Well, no one's in control because all these weird things happen to me. So no one's in control." But the scriptures and the prophets are very clear that God is not only in control, but He is in total control. As Elder Maxwell said, a very profound statement, "God's personal shaping influence is felt in the details of our lives." (Neal A. Maxwell, "Becoming a Disciple," *Ensign*, June 1996, 12). Very profound.

Abraham, in the book of Abraham, said God knows "the end from the beginning," (2:8) then in [Doctrine & Covenants] section 101: 16: "Therefore, let your hearts be comforted...for all flesh is in mine hands; be still and know that I am God."

There was, I think it was in the early 1800s, a man by the name of Oliver Wendell Holmes who made an interesting statement. I've always liked this: "The great act of faith is when man decides that he is not God." What does he mean? A man decides that *he* is not God, meaning God is in control; God is involved in our lives, even in the details. We may think we're in control, but He is in control. When we make that decision and realize that we can only control ourselves and our thoughts, not another or circumstances,

a powerful force enters our lives. That force is called faith in God, trust in His timing, and confidence in His plan for us.

Some time ago I read a Chinese proverb. I notice some Chinese students and they could probably say it in Chinese for me—a Chinese proverb that helps us with this concept. Very interesting. “Never try to teach a tiger to sing. It wastes your time and annoys the tiger.” Sometimes a young woman may waste her time trying to get that guy to like her, and it may in the end turn out to be a waste of time and annoy the fellow. And we could say that in reverse for the young men, right? Young men are equally in that boat trying to teach the tiger to sing your song, and that’s not how it happens.

Well, let’s talk about trust in His timing for just a minute. I asked Matt Tittle, “Are any of the students taking Calculus?” He answered, “Well, yes, there are some students taking Calculus.” And I said, “Oh, boy, I’m at home then,” because in Calculus you find out about time—what kind of a variable is time? Almost always on the x-axis. It’s called an independent variable. And an independent variable means I can’t control it. I can’t control time.

Elder Maxwell said about time that, “Life is so designed that we constantly feel time and its ‘prickly’ presence.” (Neal A. Maxwell, “Content with the Things Allotted unto Us,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 72). It is just those untoward circumstances, those unusual circumstances in our lives that are of the prickly presence of time. It is probably those instances that are the greatest teaching moments of our lives, because we can possibly adopt a repentant attitude, and we can probably do it because we really are in control of ourselves. We are in control of our thoughts and our words and our deeds. And more importantly, we are in control of our reaction to what someone else does to us. We control that. We can get bitter, angry, upset, or we can find another solution. But we’ll talk about that in just a second.

President Faust said this, and I thought it was so profound: “It is not so much what happens to us, but how we deal with what happens to us,” (James E. Faust, “Where Do I Make My Stand?” *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 18). It is so important to realize that it isn’t what happens to us—it is our reaction. Did we overreact, under react, etc. to what is transpiring in our lives?

Confidence in His plan? I guess the question can always be asked, “Why the serendipitous nature of life?” And we are reminded of a thought—I think James Allen said this: “Circumstances do not make the man, but reveal the man [or woman] to himself, to others, and to God.” One set of circumstances that are ugly, bad, or sad can make one person bitter, discontented and angry. That same set of circumstances to another person can make them grateful, happy, and appreciative. Isn’t that interesting? It depends on our attitude of how we want to view the external forces that happen in our lives.

I think a very important thing happens in your age group and maybe even a little younger. We start to notice what I call “fairness.” It is how we react when those who do not live God’s commandments seemingly get ahead. They get the new car; they get the good job; they get a lot of money; they get a nice house; and they got the girl. I’m working hard, living the commandments, serving, scraping the snow off the sidewalks, and no one even noticed me doing that. There’s a very important scripture in 3rd Nephi 24. It is particularly important because of who wanted this chapter in 3rd Nephi. You will notice that this is one of the few chapters in the Book of Mormon that the Lord himself commands the Nephites to record. So it must be a pretty important chapter.

In verse 1: “And it came to pass that he [the Savior] commanded them [the Nephites] that they should write the words which the Father had given unto Malachi, which he should tell...them.” The Savior then repeats the words that were given to the prophet Malachi, for the Nephites. So chapter 24 should be pretty important.

Back to the question of fairness. Starting in verse 13: “Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say: What have we spoken against thee?” Well, we grumbled. We said, “They got it and I didn’t. They got all the good things and I got nothing.”

Malachi says it this way in the scripture: “Ye have said: It is vain to serve God...what doth it profit that we have kept his ordinances and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?” We did all our home teaching, we did all the things that we are supposed to do.

“And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another [in these meetings and other meetings that you have] and the Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.”

And then the Lord says: “And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” (verses 13-17)

Not for a second does the Lord miss a person. He sees all that we do. He knows fairness and unfairness. He had more unfairness given to him than anyone on the earth. He was the Son of God, and they reviled him and spit on him, and he suffered all of those things.

Well, we still need to set goals. We still need to make plans. We still need to serve. We need to do those things, but we need to recognize that we simply control the procedure. We control the agenda of the things that are going to happen in life, but we don't control the outcome.

This particular statement by Nancy May is particularly important because when we decide to improve our lives and ourselves, we, by accident, influence another person. By accident. Not by planning; by accident.

I have just one quick little example. When I was a bishop I had a real good-looking, about 25-year-old girl come into my office. She said, “Bishop, I don't know why I can't get any dates. I don't know what's happening.”

Well, I looked at her and I thought, “I don't know what's happening either.” She was real pretty, and she hadn't had a date in four years!

She said, “What am I doing wrong, or what's happening?” We talked about this very principle: “You can control only yourself. Why don't you read the scriptures, every day?” I gave her some scriptures to read. “Why don't you fast once a month, then fast for special help?” and a number of things like this. She started to focus on how she could improve herself and her relationship with the Lord. We're happy to report that three or four months later, she found a real nice fellow, and six months later they were married.

Improving ourselves is the key. Look inward so that we can unravel some of these things. Let me give you some steps of how to do this really quickly, some ideas that you

may want to consider. In Moroni 7:19: “Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren [and sisters], that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil.” Now think about that for a second. Search diligently that ye may know good from evil? No, that is not what the scripture says. It says “search diligently *in the light of Christ*” because you can search diligently listening to talk-show hosts on TV, and you may not know the difference between good and evil. It says “Search diligently in the light of Christ, that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing...ye certainly will be a child of Christ.”

So we have to search diligently and then lay hold upon the thing that is good. Let me give you some “search diligently” ideas. You know, thinking about that, let me tell you a quick aside. A man or woman doesn’t choose evil because it’s evil. They do it because they mistake evil for good, because they didn’t listen to the light of Christ to help them determine between good and evil. We don’t say, “Well, I’m going to choose evil today.” We only mistake it for something that is good in our lives. That is why we need the light of Christ in our lives.

We all know very well in the 130th section of the Doctrine and Covenants pretty well. Here are some suggestions as to how to improve ourselves. Search diligently in the light of Christ. And then in the 130th section: “And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life—how?—through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.”

So diligent searching and obedience is another tip. You can all quote Mosiah 3:19 verbatim, right? We will just read it so we don’t miss a word here: “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever...unless—and notice the word here—unless *he* yields [it isn’t “unless my girlfriend yields, my boyfriend yields,” it is unless *I* yield] to the enticings of the...Spirit.” That is how we get away from being a natural man in our lives.

In 1 Nephi 11 I think is one of the great scriptures of the process, what I call the process for improvement in life. I’m going to take it apart a little bit and maybe add a few words here. I think there are four steps that are mentioned here in 1 Nephi 11:1: “It came to pass after I had desired to know the things...my father had seen....” So the first step is *desire*. Remember Elders and Sisters when you were missionaries? The desire is

the same kind of desire you had when you read Moroni 10:4-5 to non-members. “If you search with a sincere heart and with real intent.” We really mean it. I really want to know. I really want to know something. I really have the desire. Really.

“And believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me.” What does that mean? What is that? That is exactly what Oliver Wendell Holmes said. He is God. He knows more than I do. He knows the end from the beginning, and I am in His hands. I will trust Him. That is the real believing.

Then, “I sat pondering in mine heart.” That is the third step. Pondering in my heart. How do we ponder in our hearts? Elder Richard G. Scott talks about this a lot. We quietly—and “quietly” may infer turning the radio down, and the TV off—and quietly sit there and wait for the Lord to talk with us. It is pretty hard for that still, small voice to enter our ears and hearts when the radio is pretty loud. I’m not against radios; there is a certain time for them. But pondering is to think deeply. It is to have it really deeply in our heart.

The final step: “I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had ... set my foot.” He is saying the fourth step of improvement is that we have to go to a place that is a new place. We have never been there before. We have to leave our comfort zone. We have to be open so that we can be teachable. And that, Brothers and Sisters, is scary because we open ourselves up. “Heavenly Father, will you teach me?” We might hear things about ourselves that may be uncomfortable because we just had to go to that high mountain top. We had to go to a different place to learn about ourselves and that is scary.

I’d like to finish talking about three other issues. One was control and all of those things we talked about—improving ourselves, etc. The next thing is scary, and that’s called “fear.” So many of us have fear, and sometimes fear is good. Not very many of us like pain. I was a surgeon and when a person came in and said, “I’ve got pain right here,” I’d poke around and do some tests and so forth and say, “Yep, you need to go to the operating room; we’re going to...” “Oh, no, hold on. We’re not going there.”

It is so interesting—it is when we feel pain enough that we go to the doctor. I remember when I had my appendicitis attack. I was 50 years old. I remember having it

diagnosed and, oh boy, it hurt. I went to see my friend, and yes, “I had it, I had appendicitis.” Would you operate on me?”

He poked around, and “Yep, you do. We are going in.”

“Great. Give me my morphine, I’m going to sleep and you take it out.” See what I am saying? No one likes pain. Pain, the pain of rejection, the pain that this person doesn’t react to me like I’d like him to react to me, the uncomfortable things in life, the hurts in life that we have—none of us like those. The scary things, “I’m going to open myself up, and oh, someone may see me for who I really am.” That’s scary because I’m not much.” At any rate, that’s what we think. But that is not true because we are all something.

The great French philosopher Moliere (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin), said, “Doubts are more cruel than the worst of truth.” Doubts are more cruel than the worst of truth. You can tell the worst thing about me, and I could just sort of shrug my shoulders and say, “Yep, that’s me all right.” But when we doubt and when we have fear, why is it so cruel? It is cruel because it paralyzes us. We are paralyzed. We don’t do anything. “Oh, I’d better hide.” We hide. We avoid. We make excuses, etc.

What is the antidote to fear? “If ye are prepared, ye shall not fear.” (D&C 38:30) We have all heard that. When the final exam comes, and if you are prepared, you say, “Hey, bring it on. I am ready. I may not get an A, I may not get a 99, but I am ready. Bring it on.” Right? Or, “Are you kidding? That is going to be the hardest test. I don’t have any idea what is happening here in the class.” Right, and you are in trouble. Now you have fear because you didn’t prepare.

There is another way around fear and we all have read it in the 8th chapter of Moroni, verse 16: “For perfect love casteth out all fear.” And you say, “Oh, that’s easy. I love everybody.” That is not perfect love. Moroni tells us exactly how to get perfect love.

So, we read verses 25 and 26, “The first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;

“And the remission of sins bringeth meekness” (meekness, by the way, is teachableness) “...and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect

love.” You see, it is the Comforter. It is when we have the Comforter, when we have the Holy Ghost, when we have repented of our sins. The Comforter comes over us and gives us confidence, and we then don’t have that fear in our lives. Let’s suppose that we haven’t gained that yet. We are not prepared for our final exam and we don’t have perfect love yet. What do we almost universally do, every one of us, with pain? “Whoa, not me.” Avoid it. We all want to avoid those hard things in life, right? But you remember what Elder Bruce R. McConkie said? He said it this way, “The pursuit of easy things makes men weak.”

Okay, we decide these hard things are really hard, so we are going to avoid them. Then the second thing we do, usually, is make excuses, or we start blaming, or we start complaining. Have you ever thought why we get the story of Laman and Lemuel on page four of the Book of Mormon? We find out that Laman and Lemuel did murmur in many things against their father.

“And Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them.” (1 Nephi 2:12) See? Murmuring is a form of excuse making. “Oh, well, it is impossible. I can’t do it.”

The classic statement of Laman and Lemuel is in chapter 3, verse 31: “And after the angel had departed” (they even had an angel come to them) “Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur, saying”—what a classic statement now—“How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands?” What? An angel just talked to me! An angel talked to me! They still want to make excuses, to blame. “How could that happen? How can the Lord do that?” But you know, Brothers and Sisters, they were actually right. Laban was a tough guy.

That reminds me of two quotes. One was by Benjamin Franklin who said, “Those who are good at making excuses are generally not good at anything else.” And we see this in Laman and Lemuel from page four on in the Book of Mormon. But I’ll tell you a more sobering one was by President Kimball. President Kimball said, “Any excuse, even though valid, always weakens the character.” That is what happened to Laman and Lemuel.

They were right, Brothers and Sisters. Laban was a big, tough guy. He had soldiers around him. He could have wiped them out. They were scared. How could they do it? How could they get around Laban instead of trusting in the Lord? Do you see? The excuses didn't help. That is what President Kimball said, "Any excuse, even though valid, always weakens the character of the person."

So we have talked about fear and excuse making. The third thing I would like to talk about briefly is "selfishness." You know, the purpose of a mission for missionaries, women and men, is President Hinckley's quote on the purpose of a mission, "is to turn a selfish boy into a selfless man."

What is that all about? It is a very simple concept. Selfishness is an easy concept. It is "me, me, me, me, me." "My ears are too big." "My nose is too big and the boys won't like me." "My hair is too curly." "My lips are too small." It's "me, me, me." As opposed—and don't get confused—as opposed to what we talked about earlier. When we talk about looking inside ourselves, it is to be honest with ourselves. "Yes, I have a big nose, and I'll be just fine because I have my relationship with the Holy Ghost and God to give me comfort, peace, and direction in my life."

It is also different than focusing on those things that we need to do to improve our lives because when we do that, the Lord takes us to our own mountaintop and says, "You know what? Your ears are not that bad. Your heart is a lot bigger than others." He has a way to sort of calm us.

I would like to talk for the next few minutes about the next issue, which is truth and its relationship to decision making. I have jumped around in topics, but I think this may be helpful. You know, there are those in the outside world and even among the Church who believe there are only relative truths. I love the comment by Elder Russell M. Nelson. He said, "Of course, the truth isn't relative. It is only man's understanding of truth that is relative." Don't be fooled by your friends who are whatever—scientific, etc. It is the understanding of truth that is relative, and that understanding may have to be augmented over the course of time.

Since you are in the educational environment right now, I would like to suggest something that President Kimball said that would be helpful. "It is important to know that the treasures of both secular and spiritual knowledge are hidden ones"—I thought

that was so interesting—“hidden from those who do not properly search and strive to find them.”

Calculus actually is fun—if you, yourself grind it out. My son came to me one time and he said, “Dad, just give me the answer, will you?” Some of my children wouldn’t come to me because I would say, “Ahh, that is great. Let’s go back to basics, and we will figure this out.” Whoa. “No, no, Dad. You don’t understand. I only want the answer to the problem and get on with life.” Has that ever happened to you? You see, hidden treasures have to be, as President Kimball said, “hidden from those who do not properly search and strive to find them.” Then he said, “Spiritual knowledge is not available merely for the asking. Even prayers are not enough. It takes persistence and dedication of one’s life.”

When these treasures are discovered by ourselves, we then correctly recognize and value the Lord’s inspiration in our own lives. “I’m just out in a little apartment somewhere here on Third Avenue and I worked through a calculus problem, and the answer came. To me, alone in that dingy apartment.” It gives us the knowledge that God is there to help us if we properly do the things the way He’d like them done. We’re diligent, we’re obedient, and so forth. We have to be obedient to the rules of calculus or we don’t get the answer. You can’t guess. Some of you probably know this. You can’t guess answers to calculus problems. And if you can, I’d better talk to your professors here, because that is not the way to do it.

Well, it’s because, Brothers and Sisters, you learn to value God’s inspiration in your personal life at home when you are all alone. You are in the dark and all of a sudden, you are just illuminated by God to give you that answer and help you through that problem. That is why you have a testimony. That is when our testimony is strengthened that he is there, that he answers our prayers. And that is maybe why Elder Nelson said this: “There are few rewards as exciting as the discovery of truth.” Few rewards touch us so deeply as when we have discovered truth on our own. It wasn’t our dad; it wasn’t our mom; and it wasn’t the professor. It was you in the room that did it.

The next issue is the acceptance of truth. You know the scripture talks about how the truth will make us free? (See John 8:32) It is when we accept truth that it makes us free. Free from what? Free from ambivalence, free from ambiguity, free from tentativeness,

free from excuse making, free from ignorance. That is what the truth does, when we really go after it and search for it. We aren't totally baffled in which decision we should make. It is clear. I want to do the good things in life. We have worked it through on our own and the Lord talked to us and said, "You are okay. Go forth. Do this." We get that kind of blessing. Because we get it without what Laman and Lemuel did, without debate, without side-stepping and without hesitancy, we grab the truth and say, "That is it! I have it! I'm going to do this!" And our life turns into something very beautiful.

It is my testimony there is a power and a beauty inherent in truth itself that gives us complete commitment in our lives. It gives us clarity to our decisions and it gives us certainty that our path in life is according to God's will for us. Remember Joseph Smith in *Lectures on Faith*.

So Brothers and Sisters, please pay the price because I want to testify to you it is worth it. It is worth it when your eyes are hurting, studying so hard. You will start to get things happening. I know that happens. I know it is true.

The other thing I would like to say is because God is fair and because He is no respecter of persons, it is up to us in life to make things happen. He will be fair. It will rain on the wicked and on the righteous. He is no respecter, whether you came from China, Brazil, or Lincoln, Nebraska.

What is the blessing we get? It is in the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse 40. What a blessing we get if we follow some of the steps He has outlined for us: "For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light; mercy hath compassion on mercy," etc. Or in other words, in simple words, if we do the best we can to be the best we can, and try the hardest we can, God will match us up, usually with someone else who is also trying to get intelligence like you are. He will also match us up with someone else who is trying to get truth like you are. Truth will embrace truth. Virtue will love virtue. See? We don't really have to talk about morality in this meeting. We all know morality. It is in our bones. It is in us. But virtue loveth virtue. So when you try hard and you do the best you can, the Lord—because He is in control—will help find someone who also loves virtue the way you do in life.

Brothers and sisters, this gospel is proof Joseph was that great prophet. The Savior paid for our sins and there are holy men on the face of the earth today. They are the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. They are holy men and they are the prophets of God on the earth. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.