

Speaking Today

The Church Is for All People

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Howard W. Hunter, "The Church Is for All People," *Ensign*, June 1989, 75

For fifty-two years I enjoyed the sweet companionship of my dear wife. We are still married, for our marriage was sealed in the holy temple to continue on through eternity. Yet with her passing I became one of that increasing number who currently live on this earth as single members of the Church.

Among those who serve as General Authorities of the Church are some who have been raised in single-parent homes, some who are now single because of the loss of their companion, and others who, following such a loss, have found a new relationship of marriage with worthy and loving partners. Some who served as General Authorities have preceded their wives in death, leaving their wonderful wives to once again experience that state of singleness which they left at the altar some years before.

The First Presidency, the Council of the Twelve, and the other leaders here at Church headquarters are mindful of you who are single. We constantly pray for your happiness and well-being. We recognize that many of you have special challenges in your lives, and our hearts and our prayers reach out to you.

The Church is for all members. In acknowledging the single or married state of individual Church members, we hope we are not misunderstood, for our intent is not to stereotype you. All of us, single or married, have individual identities and needs, among which is the desire to be seen as a worthwhile individual child of God.

Our beloved prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson, recently told single members of the Church: "We see you as a vital part of the mainstream body of the Church. We pray that the emphasis we naturally place on families will not make you feel less needed or less valuable to the Lord or to His Church. The sacred bonds of Church membership go far beyond marital status, age, or present circumstance. Your individual worth as a daughter [or son] of God transcends all." (*Ensign*, Nov.

The clarion call of the Church is for all to come unto Christ, regardless of their particular circumstances. The Book of Mormon reminds us that the Savior “inviteth [us] all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; [and we might parenthetically add single and married] ... and all are alike unto God.” (2 Ne. 26:33.)

This is the church of Jesus Christ, not the church of marrieds or singles or any other group or individual. The gospel we preach is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which encompasses all the saving ordinances and covenants necessary to save and exalt every individual who is willing to accept Christ and keep the commandments that he and our Father in Heaven have given.

Each commandment given is for our benefit and happiness. To love and serve God and to love and serve his Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, should be our goal. Our focus of affection should be on these two holy Beings, and we should worship them with all our heart, might, mind, and strength. We should be engaged in assisting them in their divine purposes of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. (See **Moses 1:39**.)

The atonement that Christ wrought was in behalf of every individual. However, each must work out his or her own salvation, for we are not saved collectively. The worthiness of one’s friends or family will not save him or her. There must be an individual effort. While it is true that worthy couples will obtain exaltation in the celestial kingdom, each man and each woman sealed in an eternal relationship must be individually worthy of that blessing.

An eternal marriage will be composed of a worthy man and a worthy woman, both of whom have been individually baptized with water and with the Spirit; who have individually gone to the temple to receive their own endowments; who have individually pledged their fidelity to God and to their partner in the marriage covenant; and who have individually kept their covenants, doing all that God expected of them.

May I hasten to add that no blessing, including that of eternal marriage and an eternal family, will be denied to any worthy individual. While it may take somewhat longer—perhaps even beyond this mortal life for some to achieve this blessing, it will not be denied.

President Spencer W. Kimball gave us this inspired counsel:

“Be assured, too, that all faithful sisters, who, through no fault of their own, do not have the privilege during their second estate [earth life] of being sealed to a worthy man, will have that blessing in eternity. On occasions when you ache for that acceptance and affection which belong to family life on earth, please know that our Father in Heaven is aware of your anguish, and that one day he will bless you beyond your capacity to express.” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1979, p. 103.)

During both his mortal ministry among his flock in the Holy Land and in his postmortal ministry among his scattered sheep in the Western Hemisphere, the Lord demonstrated his love and concern for the individual.

In the press of a multitude, he sensed the singular touch of a woman who sought relief for an ailment from which she had suffered for some twelve years. (See **Luke 8:43-48**.) On another

occasion, he saw beyond the narrowly focused prejudice of a condemning crowd and the sin of her who stood accused. Perhaps sensing her willingness to repent, Christ chose to see the worth of the individual and sent her forth to sin no more. (See **John 8:1-11**.) On another occasion, “he took their little children, *one by one*, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.” (**3 Ne. 17:21**; italics added.)

As the trials of Gethsemane and Calvary fast approached, with much weighing heavily upon his mind, the Savior took time to notice the widow casting in her mite. (See **Mark 12:41-44**.) Similarly, his gaze took in the small-statured Zacchaeus who, unable to see because of the size of those congregating around the Savior, had climbed a sycamore tree for a view of the Son of God. (See **Luke 19:1-5**.) While hanging in agony upon the cross, he overlooked his own suffering and reached out in caring concern to the weeping woman who had given him life. (See **John 19:25-27**.)

What a marvelous example for us to follow! Even in the midst of great personal sorrow and pain, our Exemplar reached out to bless others. This was typical of one whose mortal life had known few comforts and who had said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” (**Matt. 8:20**.) His was not a life focused on the things he did not have. It was a life of reaching out in service to others.

How foolish we would be to fail to enjoy the rich gifts of God to us! We could well miss opportunities for providing needed blessings to others because we felt personally deprived of some hoped-for blessing and were blinded by our own self-pity.

Not only should we be careful not to deprive others of blessings because of our wanderings in the wastelands of self-pity or self-recrimination, but we should be careful not to deprive *ourselves* of other blessings that could be ours.

While waiting for promised blessings, one should not mark time, for to fail to move forward is to some degree a retrogression. Be anxiously engaged in good causes, including your own development. The personal pursuit of hobbies or crafts, the seeking of knowledge and wisdom, particularly of the things of God, and the development and honing of skills are all things that could productively occupy one’s time.

Now, may I offer a few words of counsel and love.

To you who are *unmarried men*: Don’t put off marriage because you are not in a perfect career and financial position. Do not, however, rush into a relationship without proper forethought and inspiration. Prayerfully seek the Lord’s guidance on this matter. Stay worthy of receiving that divine assistance. Remember that as a priesthood bearer you have the obligation to take the lead in seeking eternal companionship.

To you *unmarried women*: The promises of the prophets of God have always been that the Lord is mindful of you; if you are faithful, *all* blessings will be yours. To be without marriage and a family in this life is but a temporary condition, and eternity is a long time. President Benson has reminded us that “time is numbered only to man. God has your eternal perspective in mind.” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1988, p. 97.) Fill your lives with worthwhile, meaningful activities.

To you who have experienced *divorce*: Don’t let disappointment or a sense of failure color your perception of marriage or of life. Do not lose faith in marriage or allow bitterness to canker your

soul and destroy you or those you love or have loved.

To you who are *widowed*: The most important part of your life is *not* over. For some, there will be appropriate opportunity for further companionship and remarriage. But for those who, for whatever reason, do not choose this path, there can still be marvelous opportunities in life for personal growth and service to others.

To you *priesthood and auxiliary leaders*: Follow the scriptural counsel to look after the widows and the fatherless. (See **D&C 83:6**.) Take a prayerful interest in those who are single or in single-parent homes. Help them feel wanted, but not uncomfortably singled out. Remember: the Church is for *all* members.

To each *Church member*: Practice the pure religion mentioned by the Apostle James, which is “to visit the fatherless and widows.” (**James 1:27**.) Be kind and considerate of all members. Be thoughtful. Be careful in what you say. Don’t allow an insensitive remark or action to harm another. “And above all things, clothe yourselves with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace.” (**D&C 88:125**.)

May God bless each of us to treat one another as befits one who refers to himself as a Latter-day Saint. May there be none among us who are made to feel as “strangers and foreigners,” but may we all feel as “fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” (**Eph. 2:19**.)

I witness the reality of God our Heavenly Father, who loves us and hears our prayers. I know that his son, Jesus Christ, lives and is our Savior and Redeemer. May we be blessed by our faith and faithfulness in living the commandments.

Gospel topics: Jesus Christ, blessings, single members