
**Memorial Service for
Douglas Willard Paxman
Raymond, Alberta
May 29, 2000**

Remarks by Robert Douglas McCue

Our Heavenly Father's Plan

Introduction

It is an honour to have been asked by my Aunt Hazel and her children, my cousins, to address you today.

I am one of the many beneficiaries of Willard and Hazel Paxman's good works, and am pleased to be able to help celebrate Uncle Willard's life. I am a gospel novice compared to many of you here, and I feel keenly the responsibility of using the time of so many people this morning.

I have prayed for inspiration to find words and ideas that will comfort and uplift those closest to Uncle Willard, and will be of some use to the rest of us. I ask for the support of your faith and prayers to that end.

I note that on only one other occasion during my life have I felt so guided and attended by the spirit while preparing a talk. I have felt on several occasions during the past few days that "peace that passeth all understanding" the scriptures speak of being evidence of our Heavenly Father's spirit being in attendance.

I prepared these remarks while driving to and from Provo, Utah this weekend where my sons Brayden, Dallin and I, attended a father & son basketball camp. I therefore have had many hours to pray, ponder, discuss aspects of this talk with my sons, and consider a number of different ways in which I might discharge the responsibility I have this morning.

The trip has been a sweet experience all the way around, except for certain aspects of the basketball camp itself, where my mind seemed to continually write cheques that my body couldn't cash. I was often reminded that the only part of my game that is likely to improve from now on is the excuses part. As I get older, they get more creative.

This is an occasion of celebration. One of our beloved, my Uncle Willard, has successfully finished the trials of mortality, and has been called home. Thankfully, he was spared the final refiner's fire of a lingering illness, and quickly passed into a new life.

As the poet put it:

Death is a horizon, and a horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight.

I am grateful for the gospel telescope that allows us to see beyond that horizon.

Uncle Lorne has spoken about Uncle Willard's life. I have been asked to set his life in the context of our Heavenly Father's plan for each of us.

The Gospel Plan

Joy

Although some might disagree with me, it is my view that the gospel's foundation principle is joy.

Man is that he might have joy. 2 Ne. 2:25

Our Heavenly Father's plan for us, our Saviour, his atonement, the commandments, the Church's organization, etc. are all intended to help us achieve joy.

It is important to distinguish joy from pleasure. Neal Maxwell wrote that:

Pleasure usually takes the form of "me" and "now", while joy is "us" and "always."

Joy is long lasting, and often is derived from relationships with family and other community members. Those who seek joy itself seldom find it. Those who give themselves, their time, their energy to other people or a good cause usually experience joy as a result.

Pleasure is the spiritual equivalent of cotton candy. It is not bad, but we should not rely upon it for long term sustenance. Those who do are at best never satisfied, and if they pursue this course for long enough may develop serious spiritual or mental imbalances as a result of a consistent lack of required nutrients.

Many who spend their lives in a futile search for joy in paths away from our Heavenly Father's gospel come to believe that it does not really exist. One of these people said that:

Happiness is an imaginary condition, formerly attributed by the living to the dead, now usually attributed by children to adults and by adults to children.

Let me assure you to the contrary. Joy does exist. It is found in the mundane as well as the unusual aspects of our life. For example, I experienced it in abundance while with my sons this weekend.

Becoming Like Our Heavenly Father

The next logical question is what are we to do to find this joy? The answer is found throughout the scriptures. Is it, basically, that our capacity and opportunity to experience joy will increase as we become like our Heavenly Father. That is why we often feel joy when we give to others - by so doing we are usually emulating our Heavenly Father.

I believe that we experience more joy as we increase our capacity to feel and express love. Our Heavenly Father is our model in that regard.

I am a simple person, and so I like to find simple rules that I can use to help me get to where I want and need to be. Hugh B. Brown provided one of these in a talk he gave years ago. He said, in effect:

As we get to know our Heavenly Father, we will be irresistibly drawn to become like him.

This has meant for me that if I consistently learn things about Him, think about Him, and measure my standard of conduct against His, I will be attracted to Him and will consciously and subconsciously modify my conduct toward his standard. Each step I take in this direction produces joy and therefore reinforces the process. At some point as we do this, we receive His "image in our countenance" as it indicates in Alma 5:14.

The change in our countenance here described is not, in my view, the result of reaching the end of the process. Rather, it is the result of committing ourselves to the process and taking steady steps in the right direction. As long as those steps are being taken, His image will be in our countenances because His joy and love will be in our hearts. As long as we are pointed in his direction, our faces will reflect a portion of his light, no matter how far from him we are.

If we think about most of the things we are asked to do as members of the Church in this context, they make a great deal of sense. For example, consider the commandments and regular prayer and scripture study.

The Commandments

The commandments are all given for the purpose of assisting in the developmental/joy seeking process. They outline certain basic elements of our Heavenly Father's nature, and by so doing they either direct us away from things which will bring sorrow to us and others, or direct us to do things that will bring joy. It is interesting to note that complying with most of these "positive" commandments involves spending energy to help others. Ironically, after spending this energy, we feel more energized - we feel joy.

Regular Gospel Study and Prayer

One of the most consistent pieces of advice our Church leaders have given us over the years is that we should study the gospel daily. When considered in light of the process described above, this makes powerful sense. The scriptures, other gospel writings such as the General Conference Reports, and the temple ceremony are primary sources of information respecting our Heavenly Father's nature. I recently read an article about the temple in which the writer said that he once went to the temple for the sole purpose of identifying parenting principles that are taught in the temple ceremony. He found between 20 and 30. I have not yet tested his findings against my own experience.

When we study the scriptures, what are we doing? Are we not learning about how our Heavenly father has dealt with and taught his children over the ages? When we go to the temple is it not more of the same? Should we not constantly ask the question as we study: "What am I learning or being reminded of about my Father in Heaven's character and how do these concepts apply to my life in the here and now?" When we pray, are we not reminding ourselves of his standards and comparing those to our present conduct? Some meditation (transcendental or otherwise) as an aid to prayer or for other useful purposes can also lead to increased understanding of God and self. Seen in this light, regular study, prayer and meditation are perhaps nothing more than an exercise in coming to know God, which will irresistibly cause us to want to take steps to become like Him.

A final point regarding personal study. I was told at a Church leadership meeting some years ago that the Church had commissioned a study of a large group of its young people in an effort to determine which factors were most important in predicting the young people that would live joyful lives, serve missions, marry in the temple, remain active church members etc. A sophisticated multivariate statistical framework for the study was devised, and it was conducted using sound scientific principles. The factors that were considered included the following: Was the young person raised by parents who were active members of the Church?; did the young person attend church regularly?; did the young person attend seminary?; were the young person or their parents born members of the Church or were they converts?; did the young person study the gospel, pray and engage in other conduct defined as "private religious observance" on a regular basis of their own choice, as opposed to doing these things as a result of parental or other requirement?. This study concluded that by far the most important predictor of a fulfilled life, missions, temple marriage etc. was whether the young person had developed the habit of private religious observance. If they did not attend seminary or church, were not supported in the home by other church members, etc., but had their own internally motivated private religious observance, they were more likely to do the things that bring joy than a youth with all of the apparent advantages that family and church community can confer, but who had not internalized the gospel to the point where they had developed their own private religious observance. I suspect that if a similar study were done with regard to adults, it would find a similar connection between adult private religious observance and most of the behaviours we think of as desirable within the Church. This underlines and provides some objective evidence to support what most of us intuitively feel - that regular gospel study and prayer has a positive effect on behaviour. It is my personal experience and observation in the lives

of others that the habit of daily or almost daily gospel study and fervent prayer are the key to becoming godlike. It is not coincidence that the General Authorities emphasize these habits as being essential to our well being.

Relationships

Becoming like our Heavenly Father has a lot to do with the nature of the relationships that we form.

Boyd K. Packer every now and again says something so profound that I find myself referring to it over and over again. One of these statements is that when we die, we only take two things with us. First, we take our character with us. That is, our honesty, or lack of it, our self control, or lack of it, our love or hate for our fellow men, etc. Second, our relationships go with us, both the good and the bad. Of course, the nature of our relationships is to a large degree dictated by our character. Dishonest, selfish people tend to have dysfunctional relationships. And for some reason, honest, loving people tend to have lots of satisfying relationships.

The way we interact with each other through the Church and other social structures is designed to give us the chance to develop healthy relationships. In particular, the Church is designed to maximize opportunities to serve each other, and therefore to become intimate - to relate to each other in ways that really matter. In the modern vernacular, we are given lots of chances to “be there” for each other.

Ruth Ann Anderson, who used to be Ruth Ann Smith from Raymond, was one of Juli's friends while we lived in Vancouver. When we moved to Calgary a number of years ago, Ruth Ann gave Juli a framed piece of needle point that reads:

Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Others stay for a while and leave foot prints on our hearts, and we are never, ever the same.

Footprints on our hearts, and we are never ever the same. How that captures what a wholesome, intimate relationship does. Our feelings about our friendship with Don and Ruth Ann Anderson and their family could not be better put.

The Church is of course not the only place this type of opportunity to relate to others in an intimate setting exists, but that is much of the underlying purpose of the Church's organization.

What a wonderful harvest of relationships Uncle Willard has reaped. Family, church service, three missions, community service. He has left footprints on countless hearts, including mine. He is a rich man indeed.

In addition to intimate relationships, we have countless casual relationships in our communities. These are telling in some important respects. I once heard it said that the best measure of man's character is taken by watching how he treats people who he does not need, and does not owe

anything to. Treating this type of person well, that is, with love and respect, is what it means to not be a respecter of persons. My observation of Uncle Willard give him high grades in this regard. It was interesting to listen to both Kevin and Uncle Lorne make the same observation. We did not coordinate our remarks in that regard.

The Expanding Circle

Our lives and the Church are organized to permit us the opportunity to expand our capacity to love. As we do this, we become more like our Heavenly Father, and therefore experience more joy.

As children most of us are completely self centred. As teenagers, it gets worse. Finally, as we near the end of our teenage years, glimmers of recognition that we are not the centre of the universe begin to appear. For many young members of the Church, the opportunity to serve a mission is the first real experience with focussing large amounts of energy on someone other than themselves. It is a life changing experience for those who take advantage of what it has to offer.

Courtship and marriage are another opportunity for a quantum change in attitude. This type of relationship invites us to give completely to another person. This is both an opportunity and a challenge. If we are successful, we will learn to give completely without surrendering personal identity. We will form a partnership that uses the best of both personalities while leaving room for continuing personal growth.

Many of us have the opportunity to be parents. The birth of one's first child has been called by some psychologists the single most radical change a human being can go through. It ranks above marriage, moving away from home, divorce, starting a new job, etc. in that regard. Loving a child, giving large portions of your soul to him or her and then eventually releasing that child to chart his or her own course through life is one of our greatest challenges. As more children arrive, the capacity for love somehow expands. Later grandchildren may arrive bringing with them additional challenges and opportunities.

For members of the Church, the Ward or Branch they attend is a literal extension of the family. We home teach each other, visit teach each other, run Scouting and Young Women's programs, counsel each other, and serve each other in a myriad of ways. It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. The Ward is our village, particularly for those of us not fortunate enough to live in small communities such as Raymond.

Many of us are at one time or another called by the Church to love and serve a large group of people. Bishoprics, Relief Society Presidencies, Young Men or Young Women's Presidencies, Primary Presidencies, teachers of classes etc. sometimes require that the heart expand to what often seems like unimaginable proportions before the calling is accepted. And expand it does. This is all part of the gymnasium that our Heavenly Father has designed for our development. Following the gospel is a participation, not a spectator, sport.

Are all members of the Church perfect? Of course not. Will we ever be disappointed, hurt or perhaps even betrayed by one of our brothers or sisters? Of course we will. They are almost all well intentioned, but imperfect. They will try us occasionally, and lift us continually. This is all part of the gymnasium. The same applies to our church leaders. J. Golden Kimball once overheard a church member complaining about a church leadership calling that had been extended to a man the member felt was difficult to deal with and unsuited to such a position of trust. J. Golden is reputed to have said:

Well Brother, some's sent to lead us and some's sent to try us. Maybe this one's sent to try us.

As the group we are called upon to love expands, the demands on our time and our heart expand. General Authorities of the Church are called upon to love the entire world as we love our families and those we are responsible for within our Wards and Stakes. Our Heavenly Father, of course, loves all mankind. We again see how the system he has set up for us here on earth is designed to help us become like Him.

A Custom Made Plan

I believe that many of our lives' important features and experiences are not left to chance.

A long time ago I read a book called "Charlie's Monument", by Blaine Yorgason. It is so long since I last read it that I am not sure how much of what I will say is from the story, and how much is what it has come to mean for me.

Charlie was a crippled little boy who lived in frontier times. He had one arm and one leg that did function. In pioneer times, this was of course a much more severe handicap than it is now. He did not learn to walk on a crutch until years past the time most of his peers were running. As a child, he got around by dragging himself through the dirt. One day when he was about five, he was sitting by the water pump drawing in the dust with his crutch when his mother came out to get water. Other children were running and playing nearby. The depth of the differences between him and the other kids was beginning to dawn on him. As his mother bent down to fill her bucket, he asked "Mom, why don't my arm and leg work like the other kids?" I can only imagine how this question made his mother's heart ache. Her answer was profound. She told him that our Heavenly Father made him with one leg and one arm that did not work because if he had two good legs and two good arms, he would for sure miss some of the things he needed most if he wanted to become like our Heavenly Father. The story goes on to recount how Charlie eventually learned to walk on a crutch, became a great horseman and a hero in his community, and accomplished many wonderful things.

This is obviously an extreme case, but in my view it illustrates a true principle. We each have "bad" legs or arms of one kind or another. Our life experience is shaped by these seeming accidents of fate, whether they relate to our physical makeup, our psychological makeup, our family circumstances, things people do to us, etc.

As noted earlier, the purpose of this life is to expand our capacity for joy, and allow us to experience joy. We are each unique individuals, and each of us needs to stretch and grow in different ways to become complete. Therefore, the challenges this life presents to us are tailor made to some extent with that in mind.

One of the most profound things I have ever read in this regard was in a book by Victor Frankl. Dr. Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who was captured and tortured by the Nazis. One of the many inhumane things he was subjected to was experimental castration. As he was undergoing this excruciating procedure, he was struck by the idea that the Nazis could take everything from him except for his ability to decide how to feel. That was his ultimate freedom. And he decided that they would not force him to hate them, or to feel any emotion that would hinder him while he fully enjoyed what was left of his existence when his time with them passed. He said that this idea became his mantra, preserved his sanity, and has since imbued his life with power in many respects.

What a great concept. Our ultimate freedom is to decide how we will react to life's unexpected ups and downs. We have the power to decide. If Dr. Frankl could make the decision he made, surely we can deal with most of what we have to. The idea that most of the significant things that happen to us were factored into our Heavenly Father's plan for us is of significant assistance in this regard as well.

I believe that each of us had some sort of an interview before we came to earth in which certain of the significant features of our existence here were outlined for us and their purpose explained to us. I believe that we accepted the opportunity of coming to earth with some knowledge of the challenges that awaited us, and why they were an important part of our experience. Of course, not everything was choreographed in advance. Our free agency and the free agency of others play a significant role in our experience here. But many things were, I am sure, known in advance, and shared with us. In my case, I am sure that I was thrilled when I was told that I would have a full head of thick, wild brown hair - and then suffered when told that this would only last until I was 25, and then it would all fall out. To add insult to injury, I learned that each of my four brothers would keep their hair. Finally, I suspect that I was told that my parents would compensate for passing this genetic defect on to me by making special arrangements in their wills.

The belief that our Heavenly Father has a specific design for us is a powerful thing. It changes every challenge or difficulty we may face from a stumbling block to a stepping stone, and dramatically increases our chances of living happy lives. When combined with Dr. Frankl's freedom to choose how we react principle, it imbues every aspect of our lives with divine intrigue. "How can I use this experience to become more like my Heavenly Father?" becomes our perpetual question. Nephi was speaking from this perspective when he said that God does not ask a man to do something without opening up the way for him. Much of the nature of our experience is determined by the lens through which we choose to see life. This is the lens I choose.

Adversity's Role

The role of adversity in this process is easy to understand, and difficult to bear.

In our spiritual lives, adversity plays the same role as friction and gravity play in some aspects of our physical lives. Without friction and gravity it would be impossible to build muscles.

There are basically two types of exercise used to build physical muscles - endurance training and strength training. Endurance training is relatively low level exercise, but lasts for a long time and builds our capacity to go the distance. It also tends to make us become creative in finding better ways to do the task that confronts us. Strength training does not last long, but requires all we have to give. It builds our physical power quicker than anything else can. It also often causes creative action as we seek ways to accomplish our task. Both endurance and strength training have direct spiritual analogues.

Here is what President Hinkley has to say about one aspect of endurance training:

Most putts don't drop. Most beef is tough. Most children grow up to be just people. Most successful marriages require a high degree of mutual toleration. Most jobs are more often dull than otherwise. Life is like an old time rail journey - delays, sidetracks, smoke, dust, cinders, and jolts, interspersed only occasionally by beautiful vistas and thrilling bursts of speed. The trick is to thank the Lord for letting you have the ride.

And I would add, the trick is to find ways to enjoy the ride.

Doesn't that make you feel better? It does me. If that is how President Hinkley has experienced life, I'm not so bad after all. He is saying, basically, that we just have to keep perspective, and stay in the race. Continually reminding ourselves of our Heavenly Father's plan for us by praying, studying, attending church etc. is the only way to be sure we will stay the course.

Here is how strength training works. In the weight room, serious lifters work in pairs. One lifts, the other spots. The man lifting says: "That is all I can do!", and his spotter says: "No, you can do one more." This happens over and over. Finally, there is collapse and the spotter catches the bar. It is only with the help of a spotter that the lifter will do all he can, and therefore develop his strength as quickly as possible. Our greatest progress is made while on the razor's edge at the limit of our abilities. And most of us are not good judges of what we can and cannot do.

It is with regard to the "strength training" aspect of our spiritual workouts that our knowledge that our Heavenly father will not require more of us than we have to give is crucial. We will always, always, find a way through. If we trust our own instincts regarding what we can do, we will miss many opportunities to develop ourselves. These opportunities often come by way of assignment from our church leaders, and from responding to calls for help issued to us by others, or the

whispering of the spirit.

We often find ourselves on the horns of a dilemma when callings are extended to us at Church. It is seldom convenient to take Church callings. It is my opinion that we should not blindly accept every calling. The person extending the call should ask questions designed to determine if we are in a position to accept the calling, and do a good job. If those questions are not asked, we should walk the person extending the calling through them ourselves. After the Church leader has been advised of all the facts relevant to our performance of the call, he or she is then in a position to receive the inspiration required to extend the call. As a general rule, inspiration will not come before this information has been gathered. If once the requisite information has been shared with a Church leader a calling is extended, we should accept it. He, with our Heavenly Father's guidance, is our spotter in this circumstance. However, if we do not tell him about circumstances, such as family difficulties, illness etc. which may have a real effect on our ability to perform the calling, he will not be able to do his job properly. The weight room equivalent would be neglecting to let your spotter know that you have a severely sprained wrist before starting your strength training session.

An example of spiritual strength training occurred for Uncle Willard and Aunt Hazel when some 25 years ago they agreed to have a troubled teenager named Bob McCue come and stay in their home while they already had a house full of teenagers, and Uncle Willard was serving as Bishop. The logical thing to do was to say that their plates were already overflowing with challenges, and therefore they could not help. They did not do that. They invited me into their lives, and while the experience was in some ways difficult for both me and them, I am not confident that things would have turned out so well for me without that experience and their help. They and their family left footprints on my heart.

From a spiritual point of view, our lives are full of examples of strength and endurance training. Consider Uncle Willard. He did not have an easy life in many respects. Farming has never been easy, and the changes in the international economy during the past several decades have made it more difficult. I tell my cousins that it is a good thing they have the farm. Otherwise, they wouldn't know what to do with all that trucking income they have.

Uncle Willard knew lots about work - hard work. I experienced this first hand, and learned a lot about work from him and his boys. During the last year I lived with my parents in Victoria, one of the many problems I had was insomnia. I had trouble sleeping at night, and was tired all day. There is something about 12 hours a day tossing hay bales out in the field that takes care of insomnia. I don't recall having any trouble sleeping at night while I lived at Uncle Willard and Aunt Hazel's.

Uncle Willard and Aunt Hazel have given generously of their time in church and community service. Uncle Willard has served as Bishop and in many other responsible church and community callings. He often did this during periods of time when family and other challenges took a great deal of his time and strength.

Uncle Willard and Aunt Hazel raised nine kids, and we have pretty much lost track of the number

of grand kids. I debated whether to tell any stories to illustrate how difficult some of my cousins were to raise, and decided I shouldn't do that. However, since Uncle Lorne has already gone down that road, I am prepared to confirm that what he says is true. The Paxman boys were, and are, an energetic, fun loving bunch. Randy and Reg were gone by the time I arrived, which took some of the heat off Uncle Willard and Aunt Hazel, but John, Scott and Lloyd were still a handful. Gary was too little to be much of a challenge then. By the way, they say nothing feels quite like fatherhood, but shovelling money into a bottomless pit and having an endless rock concert installed in your head both come close. Uncle Willard had plenty of adversity, as well as joy, on the home front.

Finally, I must note that Uncle Willard stood for election federally on several occasions as a Socred. I need say nothing more than this to prove that he was well acquainted with adversity.

The overall effect of adversity is to build and refine us.

Neal A. Maxwell put it this way:

Therefore, how can you and I expect to glide naively through life as if to say "Lord, give me experience but not grief, not sorrow, not pain, not opposition, not betrayal and certainly not to be forsaken. Keep from me, Lord, all those experiences which made thee what thou art. Then, let me come and dwell with thee and fully share thy joy.

Often adversity produces humility. This is important, because as Henry David Thoreau stated:

Humility, like darkness, reveals heavenly lights.

Our Heavenly Father's plan for us is full of irony. Often things that look like adversity turn out to be something quite different. An example of this is described in Matthew where the Saviour tells us to take his yoke upon us, and then promises that his yoke will be easy and his burden light.

I have experienced this, and know it to be true. I also recently heard Rick Melchin, President of the Calgary West Stake, speak about certain challenges he faces. He was until recently the president of a company called Three Sisters Resorts that is developing a massive resort near Canmore. That project has run into all kinds of problems, most of which are related to environmental issues that were raised after the development was well under way. As a result of the delays the project has experienced, Rick has run into numerous financing problems. Most recently, a \$90,000,000 financing package he was counting on was cancelled, and he was put in a position for weeks where the project's very life was threatened. This meant a potentially huge financial loss for him, financial losses for many investors who had trusted him with their money, and the loss of many jobs which families depend on for their livelihood. He said he has never faced anything so challenging and gut wrenching. He had trouble sleeping at night for months, and every day was filled with agonizing, difficult decisions which never quite felt right. On the other hand, he was fairly recently called as a Stake President, and had the affairs of the Stake to attend to. One would think that the combination

of these two burdens would have been crushing. He said that the opposite was the case. While acting in his capacity as Stake President, often making decisions of even greater importance than those he made at work, he almost always felt a peace and surety that buoyed him up and made him feel that all was right with the world despite the difficulties his business had encountered. His yoke was easy and his burden was light. He regularly encountered that "peace that passeth all understanding" that the scriptures speak of.

We should take care not to see adversity when confronted with an opportunity to experience our Heavenly Father's spirit and feel his peace. The packaging is often misleading. In cases where you are having difficulty telling the difference, perhaps you should go find an objective spotter to help you.

Greetings and Goodbyes

It has been said that death is the one time where if we listen carefully we can hear simultaneous tearful goodbyes and joyous greetings. I believe the same can be said of births.

Death is part of our Heavenly Father's plan. Often it comes sooner than seems appropriate to us. And in almost all cases, the loss of a loved one and the resultant change in our lives is difficult to bear. Even the knowledge that we will be together again after this life is sometimes cold comfort because of uncertainty as to how each of us will have changed by the time we are together again. Nonetheless, we are promised that we have the chance to be together again, and if we are both on the track of trying to become like our Heavenly Father, it is certain that the reunion will be filled with love, and we will continue our relationship virtually uninterrupted. The Gospel is our great common denominator.

I was amazed while at the BYU basketball camp my sons and I attended last week at the way in which I related in an intimate way with the people I met there. These were strangers. However, many of them carried such a clear, pure spirit with them that I was drawn to them, and we immediately struck up close friendships. The same thing has happened to me in many other settings where I have happened upon a member of the Church or other person whose values I share, and found that we had so much in common that it was easy to relate to each other, and become friends. The reason this occurs is that we are both possessed by the same spirit, and have similar objectives and therefore interests in life. The next world will be the same. If we continue through life pointed toward the same goal, our relationships will survive, and in fact I believe they will be deepened and enriched by the experiences we will have during our period of separation. At our 20 year high school reunion a few years ago I experienced this very thing with a number of people I had not seen since graduation. We were still on the same track (or perhaps more accurately, we had since graduation gotten onto the same track) and therefore had a great deal to share that was important to both of us. And we understood and appreciated at a deep, intense level each other's life experience. This is how I envision the reunion I will have with loved ones such as Uncle Willard when we meet on the other side, as long as I remain faithful to the principles I now espouse.

There are two times when we particularly strain to see through the veil - when we are touched by either birth or death. It is my view that the pre-existence, this life and the spirit world we pass into upon death are much more connected than most of us are aware.

Malcolm Muggeridge, the brilliant socialist editor of Punch Magazine in England, converted to Christianity late in life. After his conversion, he wrote a number of insightful, witty essays respecting his conversion and the Christian way of life. Near his death, he wrote that one nice thing about being really old is that sometimes when you are in the state of tenuous consciousness between sleep and full awareness, you can see the lights of the city of God and feel His deep peace and love emanating from it. At times, he said, it was with great reluctance that he let go of that peace to return to his body, and life.

I hate being old, and unfortunately I am not yet old enough to enjoy the benefit Mr. Muggeridge wrote of.

The connection between this life and the next is also illustrated by the experiences certain African converts to our church have had. In the 1960's and 70's there were thousands of unbaptized converts to the Church in black Africa. They formed congregations using the Church's name, and begged the Church to send missionaries to baptize them. Their conversion usually resulted from someone getting a copy of the Book of Mormon from a friend in America, reading it, becoming convinced on their own of its truthfulness, and then spreading the word informally.

One of the earliest converts in Ghana was William Billy Johnston. He was converted as a result of reading the Book of Mormon, and then receiving a vision in which he was called to preach the gospel as found in that book. Eventually, he formed many congregations of unbaptized converts. In the early days of his ministry, he faced great persecution, and was so demoralized at one point that he began to doubt the authenticity of his call. While in this depressed state, his deceased brother appeared to him in a dream. Brother Johnston relates the experience this way:

My brother said to me "Don't worry you have chosen the only true church on earth... and I am now investigating your church." I was surprised. I did not know that the church extended to another world. It was my dead brother who brought that knowledge to me. He said that if I didn't believe him, he would sing a song from my church for me. He then sang "Come, Come Ye Saints". That was the first time I had ever heard that song. He said "don't leave the church my brother. Please see that I am baptized." It was my brother who enlightened me about baptism for the dead. Most of my relatives appeared to me in dreams and said "Reverend Johnston, do you know you have work to do for us? Our great grandsons and daughters will be in your church soon. See that we are baptized." I learned these doctrines before the missionaries arrived. Nothing they taught us seemed strange. They simply confirmed what we had already heard. Each time the Lord addressed us in dreams, he addressed us as Latter Day Saints, even though we were not yet members.

In 14 years of unordained lay ministry, Brother Johnston formed 10 congregations of unbaptized converts to the LDS Church. When the missionaries finally arrived in Africa, hundreds accepted baptism as a result of his labours.

I believe the dreams are an important connection between this world and the next. I believe that we often receive important insights into our own nature, and the world around us, through dreams. We also occasionally receive divinely inspired guidance through this medium. Of course, some dreams are the result of too much pizza too close to bed time, and nothing more divine than that. And it is not always easy to tell the difference between the important and insightful, and the just plain strange. That being said, it would not surprise me to hear in the future that Uncle Willard makes his presence felt at critical junctures in the lives of those who he was closest to - his children and grandchildren in particular. I believe that in certain important cases, such as the case regarding Brother Johnston, contact of this type between the worlds is permitted.

I would like to conclude with a personal story. I apologise for doing this, but do not know of a better story to illustrate the main point I want you to remember, and I am sure that you will not remember anything I say that is not attached to a good story.

I once had an experience that juxtaposed birth and death in a way that revealed some things to me about their nature. I have only shared this experience publically on one other occasion, and feel that it is appropriate to do so again here today.

I was serving as a young, inexperienced bishop about eight years ago in Vancouver, B.C. Juli was expecting our 6th child. Finally, she went into the early stages of labour, and we knew from prior experience that this meant that within a day or two, the baby would be born. At that point, the phone rang with news that a son of a member of our Ward had been killed in a boating accident. His mother was not an active member of the Ward, and the rest of the family were not members of the Church. I had never met this family. However, our faithful Relief Society President had stayed close enough to this family that they called for help in their moment of greatest need. At her suggestion, they asked that their Bishop come to give them a blessing, and provide whatever counsel he could. Feeling helpless, and after satisfying myself that our baby was not going to make an appearance for at least a few hours, I went down with the Relief Society President to do what I could for them.

During the course of several hours, a story was tearfully pieced together. My best recollection of that story is as follows:

The good sister's two sons, her only children, had been whale watching off a remote part of the B.C. coast when a rogue wave capsized their small boat. They were with their girl friends at the time. Both Tucker and Cordell were trained life guards and experienced outdoors men. Tucker was about 21, his younger brother Cordell was 19. The girls were of similar age. As the boat capsized, Tucker's girl friend hit her head and was badly hurt. For the next 16 hours, the four youth hung onto their capsized boat and waited for help. Because Tucker's girl friend was hurt, he stayed down in the water with her, holding her head above the water. Cordell and his girl friend pulled their torsos

up onto the side of the boat, as far out of the frigid April ocean water as they could, to conserve their body heat. After 16 hours, Tucker's girl friend succumbed to her injuries. Tucker tried to pull himself up onto the boat to join his brother, but by then was so weakened by the cold water that he could not. The other two were also so cold that they could not help. At the 20 hour mark, Tucker could not hold on any longer. The time he had spent in the water trying to save his girl friend had taken too much of his strength. He said a tearful goodbye to his brother Cordell, counselled him to hang on and take care of his girl friend, and then slipped peacefully beneath the waves. Cordell wept, but did not have the strength to do anything else. Two hours later rescuers arrived just as Cordell and his girl friend were about to expire. They both survived. Tucker, quite literally, gave his life in an unsuccessful effort to save his girl friend.

For several hours we hugged, shed tears, gave blessings and did what we could to comfort this good, grief stricken couple. Then I returned home, and a short time later took my wife to the hospital to welcome our baby into the world. I had resolved to name the baby, if it was a boy, Tucker Cordell. Juli took this news in stride, although as I recall those names had not been on her preferred list.

Juli and I had been to the hospital to await the arrival of five babies before this one, and so we knew pretty well what to expect. We knew that it would probably be 24 hours before the baby was born. The only reason we had to go to the hospital at that point was that Juli's water had broken. This is how it almost always went - Juli's water would break prematurely, we would go to the hospital, the doctors would make her walk five or ten miles around the hospital, and then finally would induce labour. We both looked forward to these occasions, although for somewhat different reasons. For me, the whole thing was pure joy, except for a relatively short time just before the baby's birth while Juli's discomfort was so severe that I could not help but share it. The hours we have spent walking, talking and waiting in hospitals for our babies to arrive are among the sweetest of our marriage. It seems that time would stand still, and an almost palpable peace would envelop us. We would discuss names, for both boys and girls, we would read humorous books to each other (Erma Bombeck was one of our favourites). And more than anything else, we would talk about this new soul that was about to become part of us, would sense her nearness, and would strain to see or feel through the thinning veil that separated us.

While engaged in this wonderful process on this occasion, I could not help but think about Tucker and his family. At one point, as I walked silently beside Juli through the halls of the Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster, B.C., I was struck by certain parallels between the experience Juli and I were having, and the one Tucker and his family had just been through. I felt the tingle and warmth that often accompany revelation, and felt inspired to share my insights with Tucker's family, and to assure them of certain things with regard to his passing. I believe that these things are principles of a general nature, and that they apply equally to Uncle Willard.

The reality of the society of family and friends that our baby was leaving to join us was impressed upon me as it never had been before. I could feel their tears and angst as they watched her departure. Their relationship would be eternally altered by this separation. They could not know whether they would ever be together again, and would assuredly understand that if they were together again, it

might well not be the same. This separation would irrevocably change things, and there was significant risk that the change would not be positive. Their sorrow would be in every way as deep and difficult as Tucker's family's as a result of his unexpected departure from this life that ended their mortal relationship, and created uncertainty as to what their relationship would be in the future.

The other side of the equation was similar too. Juli and I knew the approximate arrival time of our baby, had prepared to receive her. We waited with anxious anticipation for that event. As the baby finally made the difficult passage from her world to ours, I suffered as she and her mother suffered (although I have been assured many times that I should not dare compare what I suffered to what Juli suffered), and our reunion was joyous when that passage was finally complete. I felt certain that a similar wait, and reunion occurred with regard to Tucker. I believe that his loved ones were aware of his passage from our world to theirs, and gathered to welcome him. I believe that they watched his final hours, wept and suffered with him during the difficulties associated with the separation of body and spirit, and then embraced him as he passed into their world. I believe that as he became aware of his new surroundings, and the veil of forgetfulness was at least partially removed from his eyes, that he returned their embrace and experienced joy as he had not known it during his mortal life.

I am certain that Uncle Willard has had a similar experience. His grandparents, parents, his sister Bonnie and countless other loved ones welcomed him as he passed out of our lives, and into theirs. One of the last things I said to him while we were together at the Foothills Hospital in Calgary last Thursday was that he was about to embark on life's greatest adventure - the ultimate adventure. He smiled, and agreed. When we had this conversation, we thought he would have months to ready himself for this passage. I am glad it did not take that long.

By the way, the baby Juli and I were expected when Tucker passed away was born on April 6, 1992. She was a happy, healthy little girl. We named her Teresa Claire. "Teresa" after Dr. Teresa Cordoni, the wonderful doctor who attended to Juli and the children's medical needs while we lived in Vancouver, and "Claire" after her Grandpa Clarence McCue on whose birthday she was born. Her initials, TC, also stand for Tucker and Cordell, who touched our lives. Tucker touched us by the way in which he sacrificed himself for his girl friend. He personifies heroism at its purest. And Cordell and his family touched us by the way in which they carried on after this great travail.

Our life is eternal. It is part of a continuum. It did not begin here, and will not end here. As the poet put it, "Life is gleam between two eternities." What appears to be an ending for us, is a beginning and a reunion for others. I take great comfort from this principle.

Conclusion

I am grateful for the way in which my Uncle Willard's life has illustrated the gospel in action. He worked hard. He loved and served many, and is now enjoying, and will for evermore enjoy, the rich harvest of relationships his labours have wrought.

I am grateful for the influence of the gospel in my life. It softens me. It refines me. It teaches me how to form meaningful relationships with people both within and outside of my family, and then provides many wonderful opportunities to do just that. And my heart bears the footprints of many who have served and loved me because they first knew the Saviour's love. Uncle Willard is one of those.

I am grateful most of all for my wife, and our family. They are the centre of my universe. And today, particularly, I am grateful for the knowledge I have of our Heavenly Father's plan for us, and the peace that this knowledge brings when a loved one, such as Uncle Willard, has passed beyond death's horizon into a new life.

I leave these things with you in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.