

The Reflection in the Water

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Following is complete text of talk given by President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, second counselor in the First Presidency, on November 1, 2009 as a CES fireside for young adults at Brigham Young University.

1. My dear brothers and sisters, if we take the two hymns that we have just heard — "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" and "Do What Is Right" — and make them the motto of our lives, we will be in good shape on our way back to our Heavenly Father. What a wonderful sight you are! In my mind's eye I can imagine many other beautiful faces like yours — youthful members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in all the nations throughout the world. You may not all look exactly alike, but you have so much in common. I consider this a choice assignment, and I'm grateful to President Monson for providing me this opportunity to spend a few minutes with you.

2. The Ugly Duckling

3. One of the most beloved storytellers of all time was the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen. In one of his stories, "The Ugly Duckling," a mother duck discovers that one of her newly hatched chicks is unusually large and very ugly. At first the mother wonders if she has hatched a turkey egg, but the ugly child can swim as well as her other children. And so she comes to the conclusion that the poor thing is simply abnormal and disfigured.

4. The other ducklings, however, cannot leave the ugly child alone. They punish him mercilessly, pecking at him and teasing him and making him miserable. Finally, the ugly duckling decides it would be better for everyone if he left his family, and he runs away. During the bitter cold of his first winter on his own, the poor duckling nearly freezes to death, but somehow he survives. In spite of his privations, he feels himself getting stronger, and he loves spreading his wings and taking flight even though he's alone.

5. Then one day he sees flying overhead a flock of majestic birds, white as snow, graceful in their movements, with beautiful long necks and wide, elegant wings. Oh, what glorious and happy creatures! The ugly duckling longs to fly with them. He is afraid that they might kill him because he is so ugly. But then he decides that would be better than being pecked at by the other animals forever or freezing to death in the winter. And so he takes flight and follows them to a beautiful lake where they settle onto the water.

6. As he lands, the ugly duckling looks into the water and sees the reflection of a magnificent swan. Gradually, unable to believe it at first, the ugly duckling realizes that the reflection is his own! To his surprise the other swans welcome him, and they even agree that he is the most beautiful, most majestic of all the swans. At last he has discovered who he really is.

7. The Great Questions

8. Like this young swan, most of us have felt at one time or another that we don't quite fit in. Much of the confusion we experience in this life comes from simply not understanding who we are. Too many go about their lives thinking they are of little worth when, in reality, they are elegant and eternal creatures of infinite value with potential beyond imagination.

9. Discovering who we really are is part of this great adventure called life. Mankind's greatest minds have wrestled endlessly with these questions: Where did we come from? Why are we here? What happens after we die? And how does all this fit together — how does it make sense?

10. Once we begin to understand the answers to these questions — not with the mind only, but with the heart and the soul — we will begin to understand who we are, and we will feel like the wanderer who is finally finding home. We will feel like the young swan who has discovered at last who he really is. Everything finally makes sense.

11. The challenge is that the answers to these questions are simply beyond man's earthly capacity to logically determine. Questions that reach into spiritual things require spiritual answers. Those who reject revelation and insist on tangible evidence can only speculate or deny that there is life before or after this mortal sphere. Consequently, they may never understand who they really are or what true purpose life has.

12. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, however, we have been blessed with the answers to these questions, and we freely share them with all who will listen. We know them not because of someone's educated guess or because we found a scientific explanation. We have the answers because heavenly messengers revealed these mysteries to man. That same knowledge is available to anyone on this planet Earth who is honest in heart, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

13. This is no small thing. Throughout history, emperors and philosophers would have offered a king's ransom for what God has given freely in our time. Because He is merciful and loves His children, God has given again in these latter-days the truth about where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going.

14. My dear young friends, this knowledge allows you to see your own reflection in the water. It assures you that you are not ordinary, rejected, or ugly. You are something divine — more beautiful and glorious than you can possibly imagine. This knowledge changes everything. It changes your present. It can change your future. And it can change the world.

15. We are profoundly aware, my precious young friends in the Church, wherever you may be, that you face many challenges in your young lives. Through your leaders and contacts with you individually, I have learned about the scope of your concerns. I've chosen from among the many questions I have received just a few that I think are among the harder and more troubling ones affecting you young Saints all around the globe. Today I hope to impress upon your mind and heart how a knowledge of who you really are can help you to successfully conquer the most difficult issues in life.

16. To Be or Not to Be

17. Here is the first question: "I'm unhappy and depressed. Sometimes it seems like the world would be a better place if I weren't in it. Why should I go on living?"

18. Allow me to be clear: severe depression and thoughts of suicide are not trivial matters and should be taken seriously. I urge those who suffer from depression or thoughts of suicide to seek help from trusted professionals and Church leaders. If you know someone who is thinking of suicide, be a true friend and make sure he or she gets help. Please know that we love you and want you to be successful and happy in life.

19. That being said, most people have felt sad or inadequate at one time or another. It's natural to have times of self-doubt or unhappiness. The question "Why should I go on living?" is simply another wording of the age-old phrase penned by William Shakespeare 400 years ago and uttered by millions of Hamlets the world over since that time: "To be, or not to be: that is the question."

20. But Shakespeare was wrong — "To be, or not to be" is not the question at all. There are other options beyond that simple contradiction. For my taste, I'd have Hamlet turn to the audience and say: "Knowing that I am a child of God, what need I do and be to live up to this potential? That is the question." Now, I understand that such an edit would hopelessly ruin one of the greatest literary masterpieces of all time. Nevertheless, if I were writing a script for you, that is how I would word it.

21. Think of where you came from. You are sons and daughters of the greatest, most glorious being in the universe. He loves you with an infinite love. He wants the best for you. Do you think our Father in Heaven wants you to feel depressed and sad? He wants no such thing. He has provided the commandments, which are the royal road to a life of purpose, peace, and joy. All we need to do is follow it. Knowing and living God's commandments really do lead to fulfillment and to joy.

22. Our destiny is greater than we can imagine. If only we understood who we are and what is in store for us, our hearts would overflow with such gratitude and happiness that it would enlighten even the darkest sorrows with the light and love of God, our Heavenly Father. The next time you feel unhappy, remember where you came from and where you are going. Rather than focus on things that dampen your thoughts with sorrow, choose to focus on those things that fill your soul with hope. You will realize that these things are always connected to serving God and our fellowmen. Remember that the Lord has given you His word in the scriptures. Pray earnestly to Him; talk with Him daily. Learn of Him, and walk in His way. Serve God and serve your fellowmen.

23. Remember that there is "a time to weep" but also "a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." If your heart has been heavy for a while, perhaps it is time to allow the light of the Son of God into your heart. I plead with you — just look into the water and see your true reflection! Realize the purpose for which you were created! Lift your face toward the far horizon!

24. It is well for you to laugh! It is well for you to be happy! Lift up your voices and "praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving."

25. I cannot imagine a heaven filled only with somber beings who never speak up or who do not enjoy music and visiting with each other. That is not heaven for me. I am certain that you were not created to spend the hours and days of your lives isolated from each other in worry or despair. You were created to have joy, so let's celebrate the merciful blessings of a joyful and loving Heavenly Father!

26. You don't need to wait for permission to fill your hearts with thanksgiving and happiness. You can do this nicely on your own. Get together as young people — in your wards or branches, but also with those in neighboring stakes and districts. Dance together, study the gospel together, work together, serve your fellowmen together — and have fun doing it. It is my earnest prayer that the knowledge of who you are and what you may become will fill your souls with the peaceable love of God and that this will ignite within you a happiness worthy of your true heritage, for in truth you are princes and princesses, kings and queens.

27. Will I Ever Find My Soul Mate?

28. A second question we hear from you young people is "I'm so lonely. Will I ever find my soul mate?" I have a number of things I want to say on this subject, but let's start with the concept of finding the one person you were meant to be with — the one person who is perfect for you.

29. There is an old story about a young woman on an archaeological excavation who discovers an ancient-looking lamp. When she rubs it, a genie appears, offering her one wish. She thinks for a moment and asks for world peace — that people would love each other and live in harmony forever.

30. The genie contemplates her request and finally says: "What you are asking for is impossible. The division among the peoples of the world is too deep and has existed for too long. Please ask for something else. Anything but that."

31. The young lady thinks again and says: "Somewhere out there is the one person I was meant to be with. I want to find him — someone who is handsome, thoughtful, and has a sense of humor; someone who will help around the house, loves kids, doesn't watch sports all the time, has a great job, and thinks first about my happiness; someone who will go shopping with me and who can get along with my family."

32. The genie considers her request for a moment, sighs deeply, and then replies, "Let me see what I can do about world peace."

33. I know this may be a disappointment for some of you, but I don't believe there is only one right person for you. I think I fell in love with my wife, Harriet, from the first moment I saw her. Nevertheless, had she decided to marry someone else, I believe I would have met and fallen in love with someone else. I am eternally grateful that this didn't happen, but I don't believe she was my one chance at happiness in this life, nor was I hers.

34. Another error you might easily make in dating is expecting to find perfection in the person you are with. The truth is, the only perfect people you might know are those you don't know very well. Everyone has imperfections. Now, I'm not suggesting you lower your standards and marry someone with whom you can't be happy. But one of the things I've realized as I've matured in life is that if someone is willing to accept me — imperfect as I am — then I should be willing to be patient with others' imperfections as well. Since you won't find perfection in your partner, and your partner won't find it in you, your only chance at perfection is in creating perfection together.

35. There are those who do not marry because they feel a lack of "magic" in the relationship. By "magic" I assume they mean sparks of attraction. Falling in love is a wonderful feeling, and I would never counsel you to marry someone you do not love. Nevertheless — and here is another thing that is sometimes hard to accept — that magic sparkle needs continuous polishing. When the magic endures in a relationship, it's because the couple made it happen, not because it mystically appeared due to some cosmic force.

36. Frankly, it takes work. For any relationship to survive, both parties bring their own magic with them and use that to sustain their love. Although I have said that I do not believe in a one-and-only soul mate for anyone, I do know this: once you commit to being married, your spouse becomes your soul mate, and it is your duty and responsibility to work every day to keep it that way. Once you have committed, the search for a soul mate is over. Our thoughts and actions turn from looking to creating.

37. But what about those who despair of ever finding an eternal companion? First, don't give up. Go to activities, meet people, and do all you can. I know that dating can be rough. Rejection is one of the most painful things we can experience. Trust me, I know how this feels. I fell in love with Harriet long before she fell in love with me.

38. But this didn't stop me — not at all. I found ways to be in the same place she was. When I was administering the sacrament at church, I arranged to pass it to her family. I was doing the best I could to impress her, but I think she found me a little immature. The sparks simply weren't there for her. I despaired of ever convincing her that I could be anything more than a friend.

39. I went away, joined the Air Force, and then traveled half a world away to attend pilot training in the United States. It wasn't until I returned to Germany having completed my training as a fighter pilot — years after I had first met her — that this beautiful young woman looked at me and said those magical words I had been longing to hear: "You have matured since the last time I saw you."

40. I moved quickly after that, and within a few months I married the woman I had loved for a long, long time.

41. So don't give up, brothers and sisters. Just because you have been rejected a time or two — or three or four, or a couple hundred times — don't despair. Brethren, the secret to finding the girl of your dreams is to get to know many of them and then, when you fall in love and it feels right, ask her to marry you. If she says no, you continue to search and to pray until finally you will arrive with that young woman at the altar of the temple. Just don't give up.

42. Now, sisters, be gentle. It's all right if you turn down requests for dates or proposals for marriage. But please do it gently. And brethren, please start asking! There are too many of our young women who never go on dates. Don't suppose that certain girls would never go out with you. Sometimes they are wondering why no one asks them out. Just ask, and be prepared to move on if the answer is no.

43. One of the trends we see in some parts of the world is our young people only "hanging out" in large groups rather than dating. While there is nothing wrong with getting together often with others your own age, I don't know if you can really get to know individuals when you're always in a group. One of the things you need to learn is how to have a conversation with a member of the opposite sex. A great way to learn this is by being alone with someone — talking without a net, so to speak.

44. Dates don't have to be — and in most cases shouldn't be — expensive and over-planned affairs. When my wife and I moved from Germany to Salt Lake City, one of the things that most surprised us was the elaborate and sometimes stressful process young people had developed of asking for and accepting dates.

45. Relax. Find simple ways to be together. One of my favorite things to do when I was young and looking for a date was to walk a young lady home after a Church meeting. Remember, your goal should not be to have a video of your date get a million views on YouTube. The goal is to get to know one individual person and learn how to develop a meaningful relationship with the opposite sex.

46. Now, there are those among you fine young members of the Church who might never marry. Although they are worthy in every way, they may never find someone to whom they will be sealed in the temple of the Lord in this life. There is no way for those who

have not experienced this despair to truly understand the loneliness and pain they might feel. I know of many women who want more than anything else to be a wife and a mother, and they cannot understand why their prayers have never been answered. There are many single men who, for whatever reason, also find themselves alone.

47. First, let me tell you that your prayers are heard. Your Father in Heaven knows the desires of your heart. I cannot tell you why one individual's prayers are answered one way while someone else's are answered differently. But this I can tell you: the righteous desires of your hearts will be fulfilled.

48. Sometimes it can be difficult to see anything beyond the path immediately before us. We are impatient and do not want to wait for a future fulfillment of our greatest desires. Nevertheless, the brief span of this life is nothing in comparison with eternity. And if only we can hope and exercise faith and joyfully endure to the end — and I say joyfully endure to the end — there, in that great heavenly future, we will have the fulfillment of the righteous desires of our hearts and so very much more that we can scarcely comprehend now.

49. In the meantime, do not wait for someone else to make your life complete. Stop second-guessing yourself and wondering if you are defective. Instead, seek to reach your potential as a child of God. Seek learning. Become engaged in a meaningful career, and seek fulfillment in service to others. Use your time, your talents, and your resources to improve yourself and bless those around you. All of this is part of your preparation for having a family. Immerse yourself in your ward or branch and seek to magnify your callings, no matter what they may be.

50. The great purpose of this mortal existence is to learn to fully love our Heavenly Father and our neighbor as ourselves. If we do this with all our might, mind, and strength, our eternal destiny will be glorious and grand beyond our capacity to imagine. Be faithful, and things will work out for you. That is His eternal promise to all who love and honor Him.

51. Can I Remain Faithful?

52. A third question young people have is "Can I remain faithful?" There are those who have doubts about God or the Church. Others give in to temptation that lures them away from the safety of the straight and narrow pathway of discipleship.

53. When I was a pilot, I often saw an interesting weather phenomenon as I flew between Europe and Africa. It is called the intertropical convergence zone — a band of thunderstorms that moves north and south across the equator, filling the horizon with billowing, menacing columns of clouds.

54. I could scarcely look at these clouds without being fascinated with their beauty and majesty. They towered in massive black formations, and within them lightning sparked with brilliant light from one end to the other in an indescribable fury of fire. What a glorious and fascinating sight!

55. But what do you think pilots do when they approach these storms? They avoid them — no matter how beautiful and intriguing they appear. As moisture rises in the clouds, it begins to freeze, forming hail the size of soccer balls that can puncture metal and destroy an aircraft. Severe turbulence and electric discharges can cripple the airplane and its systems.

56. Isn't the same principle true when you see things that could cause spiritual harm? Temptation wouldn't be temptation if it didn't

appear attractive, fascinating, or fun. But, like the pilot approaching a storm, you need to learn to avoid it, no matter how beautiful or intriguing it may appear.

57. Because Heavenly Father loves His children, He has given us the commandments to keep us at a safe distance from those harmful storms. He does not force any of His children to walk in His way. He allows and expects you to choose for yourselves. But know this: some choices lead to disaster. So, choose the right.

58. I add my witness to the chorus of warnings against the terrible problem of pornography. Steer clear of it. Stay away from it. The same words we used to train our pilots regarding thunderstorms I say to you regarding pornography: "Avoid, avoid, avoid!"

59. Don't assume that you can put the nose of the plane just a little bit inside the storm — do not flirt with pornography. Remember that often the most disgusting and destructive of things can appear attractive in the beginning. Steer clear of those things that can endanger you.

60. Is It True?

61. Now the next issue: What about doubts and questions? How do you find out that the gospel is true? Is it all right to have questions about the Church or its doctrine? My dear young friends, we are a question-asking people because we know that inquiry leads to truth. That is the way the Church got its start — from a young man who had questions. In fact, I'm not sure how one can discover truth without asking questions. In the scriptures you will rarely discover a revelation that didn't come in response to a question. Whenever a question arose and Joseph Smith wasn't sure of the answer, he approached the Lord, and the results are the wonderful revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. Often the knowledge Joseph received extended far beyond the original question. That is because not only can the Lord answer the questions we ask but, even more importantly, He can give us answers to questions we should have asked. Let us listen to those answers.

62. The missionary effort of the Church is founded upon honest investigators asking heartfelt questions. Inquiry is the birthplace of testimony. Some might feel embarrassed or unworthy because they have searching questions regarding the gospel, but they needn't feel that way. Asking questions isn't a sign of weakness; it's a precursor of growth.

63. God commands us to seek answers to our questions and asks only that we seek "with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ." When we do so, the truth of all things can be manifested to us "by the power of the Holy Ghost."

64. Fear not; ask questions. Be curious, but doubt not! Always hold fast to faith and to the light you have already received. Because we see imperfectly in mortality, not everything is going to make sense right now. In fact, I should think that if everything did make sense to us, it would be evidence that it had all been made up by a mortal mind. Remember that God has said:

65. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . .

66. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

67. Nevertheless, you know that one of the purposes of mortality is to become more like your Heavenly Father in your thoughts and in your ways. Viewed from this perspective, searching for answers to your questions can bring you closer to God, strengthening your testimony instead of shaking it. It's true that "faith is not . . . a

perfect knowledge," but as you exercise your faith, applying gospel principles every day under any circumstances, you will taste the sweet fruits of the gospel, and by this fruit you will know of its truth.

68. You Are Eternal

69. There will always be voices telling you that you are foolish to believe that you are swans, insisting you are but ugly ducklings and that you can't expect to become anything else.

70. But you know better. Because of the revealed word of a merciful God, you have seen your true reflection in the water and you have felt the eternal glory of that divine spirit within you. You are no ordinary beings, my beloved young friends all around the world. You are glorious and eternal.

71. No matter your circumstances or trials in life, I urge you to remember who you are, where you came from, and where you are going — for the answers to those questions will truly provide confidence and direction for your life.

72. Your Heavenly Father lives. He knows you. He speaks to you in these latter days through prophets and apostles. President Thomas S. Monson is the Lord's prophet on earth in our day. This Church is directed by the Savior Jesus Christ. I know this. He is at the head of this Church.

73. Today I may speak to you with imperfection — and with a German accent — but I promise you that the words you feel in your heart and in your mind and in your soul come to you through the eloquence, purity, and power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost you can know the truth of all things.

74. Brothers and sisters — my dear friends — I love you. I love you with all my heart. I am grateful for you. I am grateful for your goodness. As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, I bless you individually and collectively that you may learn to know who you really are and what you must do and be to live a happy and fulfilling life.

75. It is my prayer and blessing that when you look at your reflection, you will be able to see beyond imperfections and self-doubts and recognize who you truly are: glorious sons and daughters of the Almighty God. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.