

## Bridle All Your Passions, That Ye May Be Filled With Love



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Devotional  
January 22, 2019

Brothers and Sisters,

I am truly happy (and scared) to be standing before you today. I don't know the selection process for invitations to speak at devotional, but it felt like a mistake when I was asked to speak. Nonetheless, I am honored to speak to you today and will always do my best to fulfill the what the Lord asks of me. I am grateful for my wonderful wife Audrey and thank her for her many years of support and love for me. The best decision I made in my life was to ask her to marry me. Twenty-four and a half years later, we now have seven wonderful children, the oldest of which has just introduced me.

I have found that when I speak, if I base my remarks on the words of the prophets and apostles, the message is delivered with the power of the Holy Ghost. Today, I wish to do so as I share with you a message of hope, peace, and perseverance.

Alma the Younger, in council with his son Shiblon, said in Alma 38:12,

“Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love;...”

What does this word, passion, mean? Its meaning comes from the the greek, ????? (pasko), meaning “to suffer, to be acted upon”. Passions that we develop can be “so strong as to inhibit all practice of personal freedom, a state in which the soul is in some sense rendered passive” (Denis Diderot). What I wish to speak in particular to you today is that through self-denial and mastery, we gain more freedom, we gain more happiness, we gain more love, and we can effectively influence others for good.

Note the first part of Alma's definition, that of bridle. What's a bridle? It is a piece of rigging for controlling the direction, speed, effort, and movement of a horse. It is a metaphor for control, or self-discipline. Self-discipline does not mean complete self-denial, but rather control of our senses, our passions, our emotions, our reactions. I believe that the word bridle which Alma uses is more than for just controlling our sexual impulses, although it obviously covers it. It also covers other areas of control that are just as important, if not more important.

Charles W. Penrose, an apostle and member of the First Presidency in the early 20th century, was called as a missionary shortly after he was baptized in England. He served for over ten years as a missionary. As he was finishing his mission and preparing to emigrate to Utah Territory, he noted, "A sort of quiet slander had been circulated concerning me in Birmingham by an elder from Zion and it had cut me to the quick." When he moved to become the president of the Birmingham Conference, he had taken some of his family furniture and other belongings and furnished his mission office with it. Now that he was moving, he took his furniture with him, and he was accused by someone of stealing church property. In his own words he said:

"It was intimated by one of the Elders from Zion that I was endeavoring to lay claim to the property that belonged to the Birmingham Conference... I had labored then over ten years in the ministry, most of the time as traveling elder, literally without purse or scrip. I started that way and had continued, suffering a great many hardships and difficulties and trials that I need not refer to now, and this touched me right to the heart. I did not know how to bear it.

I did not care how much I might be scandalized by enemies of the Church; I had become accustomed to that. I used to say that my hide had got as tough as a hippopotamus; I did not care what an enemy said about me.

But when an elder in the Church did that it cut me to the heart, and I felt like retaliating. But I sat down and wrote that little poem,

School thy feelings, O my brother;

Train thy warm, impulsive soul.

Do not its emotions smother,

But let wisdom's voice control.

School thy feelings; there is power

In the cool, collected mind.

Passion shatters reason's tower,

Makes the clearest vision blind."

Reflecting on the event that led to the poem, Elder Penrose wrote:

"This hymn was not intended for singing; it was written for myself. . . . I had been insidiously accused, not openly, but certain things had been said about me and my presidency of the Birmingham Conference . . . and this touched me to the heart. I did not know how to bear it. Weltering under these feelings I sat down and wrote that little poem, right from my soul, and intended it for myself..."(Our Latter-day Hymns, pp 323-24.)

Brothers and Sisters, just as Elder Penrose controlled his feelings of anger towards the brother that wronged him, we must learn to bridle our reactions to others. Our impulses might even dictate we are justified in our reactions, but nonetheless, if we take offense, we are punished more than the other person from which the offense came. Elder Penrose was able to correctly bridle his anger, and taught us to do so as well. What happens, however, if we allow the simplest of offenses to bother us? President Thomas S. Monson shared with us the story of the first President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Thomas B. Marsh. He related to us, in his talk in October 2009 General Conference, the following:

“I believe most of us are familiar with the sad account of Thomas B. Marsh and his wife, Elizabeth. Brother Marsh was one of the first modern-day Apostles called after the Church was restored to the earth. He eventually became President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

While the Saints were in Far West, Missouri, Elizabeth Marsh, Thomas’s wife, and her friend Sister Harris decided they would exchange milk in order to make more cheese than they otherwise could. To be certain all was done fairly, they agreed that they should not save what were called the stripping’s, but that the milk and stripping’s should all go together. Stripping’s came at the end of the milking and were richer in cream.

Sister Harris was faithful to the agreement, but Sister Marsh, desiring to make some especially delicious cheese, saved a pint of stripping’s from each cow and sent Sister Harris the milk without the stripping’s. This caused the two women to quarrel. When they could not settle their differences, the matter was referred to the home teachers to settle. They found Elizabeth Marsh guilty of failure to keep her agreement. She and her husband were upset with the decision, and the matter was then referred to the bishop for a Church trial. The bishop’s court decided that the stripping’s were wrongfully saved and that Sister Marsh had violated her covenant with Sister Harris.

Thomas Marsh appealed to the high council, and the men comprising this council confirmed the bishop’s decision. He then appealed to the First Presidency of the Church. Joseph Smith and his counselors considered the case and upheld the decision of the high council.

Elder Thomas B. Marsh, who sided with his wife through all of this, became angrier with each successive decision—so angry, in fact, that he went before a magistrate and swore that the Mormons were hostile toward the state of Missouri. His affidavit led to—or at least was a factor in—Governor Lilburn Boggs’ cruel extermination order, which resulted in over 15,000 Saints being driven from their homes, with all the terrible suffering and consequent death that followed. All of these events followed because of a disagreement over the exchange of milk and cream.”

Brothers and sisters, will our own decisions to be angry lead to pain and needless suffering as drastic as this example? YES, they can! Especially in the case of at least one person - YOURSELF! Imagine in your mind being called into the bishop’s office and he accuses you of committing a sin, based on the accusation of another member of the church. When you clearly explain to the bishop what really went on, he understands and all is forgiven. However, your feelings towards this member fester until you stop coming to church. You reason that you shouldn’t because that member is in fact guilty of what they accused you of. They continue to be a member of the church in good standing, and you now are angry with the bishop, 20 years passes by, that member is a general authority in the church. What was your reward? Your anger! What was that offending member’s reward? Repentance, the atonement of Christ, 20 years of activity in the church. Note that you had every right to be angry!!!! Much like getting in a wreck when it’s not your fault, it’s still a wreck!! It’s better to avoid the wreck than it is to get into one. We are all agents endowed with moral agency and we can decide to not be offended, even when we have been wronged, and have every right to be offended. President Gordon B. Hinckley shared:

“Once a man who had been slandered by a newspaper came to Edward Everett asking what to do about it. Said Everett, “Do nothing! Half the people who bought the paper never saw the article. Half of those who saw it, did not read it. Half of those who read it, did not understand it. Half of those who understood it, did not believe it. Half of those who believed it are of no account anyway” (“Sunny Side of the Street,” Nov. 1989; see also Zig Ziglar, *Staying Up, Up, Up in a Down, Down World* [2000], 174). So many of us make a great fuss of matters of small consequence. We are so easily offended. Happy is the man who can brush aside the offending remarks of another and go on his way.”

Is anger the only passion that we should bridle? Of course not. In fact, we have malice, anger, lust, depression, disgust, embarrassment, feelings of inadequacy, and many other passions to control.

President David O. McKay said: "One chief purpose of life is to overcome evil tendencies, to govern our appetites, to control our passions—anger, hatred, jealousy, immorality. We have to overcome them; we have to subject them; [we have to] conquer them" ("Emotional Maturity," Instructor, Sept. 1959, p. 281).

Elder David A Bednar spoke to the reasons as to why we should control our passions. He said

“Alma counseled his son Shiblon to ‘bridle all [of his] passions, that [he] may be filled with love’. Significantly, disciplining the natural man in each of us makes possible a richer, a deeper, and a more enduring love of God and of His children. Love increases through righteous restraint and decreases through impulsive indulgence.”

We increase not only in feeling love, but our capacity to love has increased. We should definitely bridle our passions in our relationship with our spouse. We need to control our anger, show an increase in love, be selfless. After all, we see this person every day, every hour on some days. You need to put your spouse’s needs first. This is the first key in any marriage for it to work. I was taught by one of my stake presidents that if you ever get into an argument with your wife, you apologize and say “I was wrong and you are right, and I apologize”. You do this even if you are right! Put her needs before your own. Next, putting their needs first means to love them unconditionally. If you get into marriage with the idea, “it’s okay that Frank watches football on Sunday, when we get married, I’ll change him and he won’t do it anymore.” Note that I’m not saying that you should let him watch (or don’t watch), but I am saying that you should marry them for how they are NOW, not what you want them to become. Love them unconditionally. This will help you to bridle your frustration and be more Christlike. It takes two to make a marriage a success, and takes only one to make it fail.

Find ways to serve your spouse. Small ways are the best way to start. Doing this will allow you to bridle your passions. Do the dishes, make her lunch, write a short note hidden in their homework. Clean the bedroom, make the bed before they do; in short, any small act of service goes a long way. Be home on time when you are expected. It may take time for the acts to be reciprocated, but get into the habit. Sometimes doing the dishes is way more sensual than a sit down candlelight supper for two. In addition, don’t act like you are doing them a favor by babysitting the kids--It’s not babysitting -- they are your kids too.

Some other things to consider - sometimes you just need to listen. I have known other couples where the wife complains to her husband and tells him about some problems they are having right now. He immediately proceeds and tries to fix the problems right then--don’t do that! Remember that sometimes, all they want is for you to listen, with no action or help. Actively pay attention to them, listen, empathize with them, and be there for them. Love them more than yourself. After you have listened carefully, then decide how best to take care of the problems, or if there is any action needed at all.

There will be times that your relationship will be tested, at these times, pray for help. Ardeth G. Kapp said “We are not two but three--three and me and God for eternity, a most sacred triangle, a relationship of which we are each a part.” Involve the Lord as a solid part of your marriage. Pray together.

Compromise (on both sides) is essential for a successful marriage. This is just another way that we learn to bridle our passions, when we deny something that we want for something that our spouse wants. When my wife and I were first married, I wanted to have 6 children, and my wife wanted 7, so we compromised that we would have 6 and a half. Okay, so compromise sometimes isn't possible, but sharing experiences and likes with each other is a compromise. For example, my wife loves to watch mysteries on television, but I like science fiction more. I made a decision a long time ago to watch mysteries with my wife. I prefer to go to the end of the book or story and figure out who did it the easy way, but she doesn't. What's happened is that I love the time that we have together, and I have even grown to appreciate and enjoy mysteries. I love to eat sandwiches (they are one of my favorite foods), but my wife can't stand them. She, however, will still eat them with me occasionally, exhibiting that compromise on simple things in our life. I wouldn't be the same person without my wife. She completes me and I complete her. We are together a corporation for the Lord, we are one unit. I cannot separate my identity from hers, nor would I want to. By bridling our emotions, likes, dislikes, and our passions, the more our identities are weaved and intertwined, creating a stronger force of love between us.

In addition, by learning to bridle our passions, we can also experience how sorrow can lead to happiness, comfort, guidance, and love from God. I believe that God looks after us when we bridle our passions and allows us to feel the extent of His love for us. It is that with which I wish to testify of: His love for us. I have been filled with his love in a profound way over the last 3 years.

During this time, my life has been an emotional rollercoaster. It started in April 2015, when I received an email from my mother with the subject “ALAN NEEDS YOUR PRAYERS!!”. She proceeded to tell me that my brother was having some breathing problems and had asked the ambulance to come. I remember stopping the movie we were watching, letting my kids know he needed a prayer, and praying for him. No sooner had I finished the prayer, than I received a call from my dad informing me that my brother had passed away. I was shocked! He was only 48! He passed away of a massive heart attack. He left a wife of 16 years, and three kids ages 13, 11, and 8. No one, and I'm no exception, expects their brother or sister to pass at an early age! The emotions that fled through me at the time were pain, sorrow, anguish, hate, frustration, all of which I am sure many of you are familiar with. The funeral occurred two weeks later. Mind you this was the first funeral that I had attended in my life in which someone I was very close to had died. It was quite difficult. It was made more difficult as I had had a strained relationship with my brother for quite some time. We spoke rarely, maybe once or twice a year, and he seemed busy with his life, so I didn't “bother” him. I loved him, I told myself, as he was my brother, but he had offended me many years previous. I had chosen to be offended and suffered over the years because of it. We had made strides in the years leading up to it to heal the rift, but the healing was not complete. My failure to bridle my passions with my brother and treat him selflessly made me question whether or not I will ever be at peace with him or with his death. However, the Lord knows us better than we know ourselves and he will provide us with the chance to change. I was surprised at how much a funeral was like a baby blessing or like a marriage reception. There was just as much happiness at my brother's funeral as there was sadness, if not more. We celebrate when one of God's children comes into the world, when a family unit is created, and when one leaves this life. Each is a celebration of love. At these times, I am amazed at the love that God has for us. It doesn't heal the pain of the loss of our loved one, but it does help start the healing. I felt the tempering influence of Heavenly Father at that funeral.

Two weeks after my brother passed, my wife and I found out that we were expecting a baby girl, our seventh child. We knew it was a baby girl before the ultrasound because we had been told clearly by the Lord a few years before that she was missing from our family. This blessing in my life is more evidence that God loves us and looks out for us. I strongly believe that my brother, Alan, played a strong role in bringing her to us, which has softened the sadness I felt at my brother's death. Our little Clara was born to us on January 4, 2016.

My mother had a much more difficult time with my brother passing. She had been suffering from dementia for over 10 years. Nine months later (two days before Clara was born), I received an email from my father. He said:

This evening I took Margaret [my mother] to eat. While eating she had a rather bad memory loss. I will list some of the questions that she was asking me.

- ? Where are the kids?
- ? How old was Dianne [my sister] when we got her? (my sister is adopted)
- ? How did we get her?
- ? Where is she?
- ? Where is Alan [my brother]?
- ? How old was Dianne when we got her?
- ? Where does she live?
- ? Where is Alan?
- ? How did he die?
- ? When did he die?
- ? Where is he?
- ? Who is at the house?
- ? Where are the kids?

She repeated many of these questions several times, and asked many more. I have never seen her this out of it.

As I read this message from my father, I felt a flood of desperate emotions come over me. I wanted to visit my mother right then and take care of her. Please note that this was a mere 9 months after my brother had died. She had gone downward way faster than any of us expected and the stress of the loss of her son had truly wreaked havoc with her mind. Two days later my daughter Clara was born into the world and happiness ensued for our family - I'm back at the top of that roller coaster. After this email, and the first chance that I got, I bought a ticket to see my Mom and Dad. We weren't able to take everyone, and my purpose for visiting was to visit my mom, and help out at their house if I could. Because I was leaving my family, I prayed about the dates that I should go. The Spirit told me very strongly to leave on June 8th, and return on July 5th. June 8th was the earliest that I could leave, but I was puzzled by July 5th. It's not in my nature to be off island away from my family on the July 4th. That's one of my kids most favorite holiday. But the Spirit spoke and told me to be there until then. It seemed strange, but I followed the prompting.

For the first week, I had a chance to see how she was. She didn't know her address, she thought she was in Midway, Utah, where she grew up. When I pointed out a picture of me and my family on the wall, she knew some of my kids and not the others, and she didn't know me. That was really difficult for me and I had a very difficult time coming to terms that my mother didn't know who I was. It was especially hard for me because she recognized my sister Dianne and my brother Alan both of whom are older than me. I decided to try and help my mom remember.

A few months previous to this, my wife very wisely had sent a small photo album of our baby Clara's birth and the first few months to my Mom so that she could get to know her. My mom sat for hours looking at the book and reading it. On each page, she recognized a few people, and asked about the rest. What was hard was that she would ask the same questions over and over again. I had to exercise patience like I would with a little child. My temper and frustration grew and grew. For the first few nights I had a lot of anger and rage over losing my mother even though she was still physically with me. Even though she was alive, I felt that she was dead. I felt like my life was over. Why did Heavenly Father so quickly take my mother from me? In response, what did God do? I remember vividly seeing her the next morning, and she perked up when she saw me, and asked "How are you?, It's nice to see you". I got a hug from her - it felt just like her hugs that I had 40 years ago when I was a child - my mom was still there! She still didn't know my name, but she loved me and I could feel that love. I decided to busy myself in helping them clean the house. I found myself watching the wonderful things that she did, like watching General Conference and having ice cream cones several times a week. Those two things could always make her feel better!

My dad watched me struggle and finally wisely suggested that we take my Mom on a trip to Utah to visit with her sisters. He could see that I needed to have some positive memories of my mother. The drive was quite long, a 15-17 hour drive, which we split up over 3 days. During this trip, we decided to stop and see the sights with my Mom, which included stops at pink sand dunes, Zion National Park, Kanab, and the Grand Canyon.

I spent a month with her, helping care for her. I had a enjoyable time being with her and my father. She had become a lot like a little kid. The day that we arrived back in Yuma, I offered to my dad to extend my ticket and stay longer so I could help them. He thought about it for a minute and then declined. I didn't protest, as the Spirit kicked me and told me to go back on July 5th as planned. As I was dropped off at the airport, the Spirit testified to me that I would never see my mother alive on this earth again. I gave my mother my last hug, and prepared myself to deal with that realization.

Little did I know that she would die 10 days later. The day after I came back (July 6th), she suffered a stroke. The initial prognosis was good - she was eating and there was talk of rehabilitation, and I had a chance to talk with her on the phone. She sounded in good spirits. I was in good spirits - God had tempered my emotions with love from him and my mother. I knew that whatever happened, it would be okay. Over the next week she slowly declined until she died on July 14th. My dad said that her death was one of the most spiritual experiences of his life. I believe that God was watching over all of my family at this time. If I had stayed one more day, I would not have gone home and been there to comfort my children and family, which I was able to do because he had comforted and loved me! Shortly after, we planned a trip back up to the mainland with my wife and part of my kids, where my daughters Elena, Emma, and Clara replayed the trip that my Dad and I had with my Mom as we travelled for her funeral.

Brothers and Sisters, our Father in Heaven loves us. He watches after us, even when we don't feel Him. He comforts us if we allow Him to. If we bridle our passions, we can be filled with His love, which we can in turn share with others. Conversely, the more angry we are, the less love we will feel, which leads to more anger. I was astounded how close I was to the Spirit at a time of great sorrow for me and my family. I am so grateful that He inspired me to go and see my mom when I did, and that He inspired me go home when I did. It was perfect - it helped my sister, my kids, my wife, everyone around me, including my father. At a time when my natural reaction, my natural man wanted to be filled with anger, despair, rage, and despondency, the Lord filled me with his love. He showed me that bridling my passions, serving others, and losing myself in the Lord's will was the way to allow myself to be filled with his love. I testify that bridling your passions is the path that the Lord wants us to take in order to draw closer to him. May you find this in your own lives and be filled with his love.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen