



The Tugs and Pulls of the World

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"Many individuals preoccupied by the cares of the world are not necessarily in *transgression*. But they certainly are in *diversion* and thus waste 'the days of [their] probation' " (2 Ne. 9:27).



For true believers, the tugs and pulls of the world—including its pleasures, power, praise, money, and preeminence—have always been there. Now, however, many once-helpful support systems are bent or broken. Furthermore, the harmful things of the world are marketed by pervasive technology and hyped by a media barrage, potentially reaching almost every home and hamlet. All this when many are already tuned out of spiritual things, saying, "I am rich, . . . increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev. 3:17).

Contrastingly, the perks of discipleship are such that if we see a stretch limousine pulling up, we know it is not calling for us. God's plan is not the plan of pleasure; it is the "plan of happiness."

The tugs and pulls of the world are powerful. Worldly lifestyles are cleverly reinforced by the rationalization, "Everybody is doing it," thus fanning or feigning a majority. Products are promoted and attitudes engendered by clever niche marketing.

Peter counseled, "Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Pet. 2:19). Brothers and sisters, there are so many personalized prisons!

Scoffers display the shoulder-shrugging attitude foretold by Peter: "Where is the promise of [Christ's] coming? for . . . all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:4). Such cynicism mistakes the successive casts on the mortal stage for the absence of a Director or a script.

Like goldfish in a bowl, some are mindless of who changes the water and puts in the pellets (see Jacob 4:13-14), or, like a kindergarten child whose retrieving parent seems a little late, concluding, "Man is alone in the universe."

Granted, some sincerely wish for more power in order to do good, but only a few individuals are good enough to be powerful. But craving power and the spotlight sucks out the spiritual oxygen, leaving some "past feeling" (see Eph. 4:19; 1 Ne. 17:45; Moro. 9:20). Strangely, though desensitized, some are still able to hear the beckoning click of a TV camera at a hundred yards. Doesn't the churning over the places of mortal power remind us of the childhood game of musical

chairs?

Actually, discipleship may keep the honors of the world from us. As Balak told Balaam, "I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour" (Num. 24:11-12). The rouge of recognition is so easily smeared anyway. We wince as we watch those once flattered by the world, like Judas, being used, despised, and discarded (see D&C 121:20). Nevertheless, when some of these are ready, even their hands need to be lifted up (see Heb. 12:12; D&C 81:5).

Thus, while granting the deserved role of commendation and praise, we must not forget the words of Jesus about the recipients of mortal honors: "They have their reward" (Matt. 6:2, 5).

There is an underlying reason, brothers and sisters, for all this fleetingness: those who bestow the transitory things of the world are, themselves, transients. They cannot confer that which is lasting because they do not possess it! Some, so sensing and seeing so little, want to have it all now!

Such lamentations as the foregoing lead to several specific suggestions.

To begin with, no remedy is more powerful than accessing--more than we do--the gifts of the Holy Ghost!

Let us likewise honor the special place of the family. As James Q. Wilson wrote:

"We learn to cope with the people of this world because we learn to cope with the members of our family. Those who flee the family flee the world; bereft of the [family's] affection, tutelage, and challenges, they are unprepared for the [world's] tests, judgments, and demands" (*The Moral Sense* [1993], 163).

How ironical that some go "into a far country" (Luke 15:13), leaving the nourishing family garden--in which there may be some weeds--and go into a desert with its tumbling sagebrush.

Personal righteousness, worship, prayer, and scripture study are so crucial in order to "[put] off the natural man" (Mosiah 3:19). Be wary, therefore, when some demand public tolerance for whatever their private indulgences are!

Whether young or old, we need to be good friends, but also to pick our friends carefully. By choosing the Lord *first*, choosing one's friends becomes easier and much safer. Consider the contrasting friendships in the city of Enoch compared to peers in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah! The citizens of the city of Enoch chose Jesus and a way of life, then became everlasting friends. So much depends on whom and what we seek *first*.

We can also emulate the spiritual reflexes of Joseph in Egypt: when he was tempted, "he . . . fled" (Gen. 39:12), showing both courage and good legs! Youth and adults must get out of circumstances and situations which threaten.

The returning prodigals are never numerous enough, but regularly some come back from "a far country" (Luke 15:13). Of course, it is better if we are humbled "because of the word" rather than being compelled by circumstances, yet the latter may do! (see Alma 32:13-14). Famine can induce spiritual hunger.

Like the prodigal son, we too can go to "a far country," which may be no further away than a vile rock concert. The distance to "a far country" is not to be measured by miles but by how far our hearts and minds are from Jesus! (see Mosiah 5:13). Fidelity, not geography, really determines the distance!

Even with all of the world's powerful tugs and pulls, spiritual feelings can and do assert themselves

anyway. Doubts of doubt can intrude. All the quick fixes do not really cure the emptiness and boredom of secularism.

Further, some who laboriously scale the secular heights find, after all, that they are only squatting atop a small mound of sand! They have worked so hard to get there!

But why covet wealth anyway, if we only "spend money for that which is of no worth . . . [and] which cannot satisfy" (2 Ne. 9:51).

Like Jesus, we can decide, daily or instantly, to give no heed to temptation (see D&C 20:22). We can respond to irritation with a smile instead of scowl, or by giving warm praise instead of icy indifference. By our being understanding instead of abrupt, others, in turn, may decide to hold on a little longer rather than to give way. Love, patience, and meekness can be just as contagious as rudeness and crudeness.

We can also allow for redemptive turbulence, individually and generally (see 2 Ne. 28:19). Hearts set so much upon the things of the world may have to be broken (see D&C 121:35). Preoccupied minds far from Him may be jolted by a "heads up" (see Mosiah 5:13).

Many individuals preoccupied by the cares of the world are not necessarily in *transgression*. But they certainly are in *diversion* and thus waste "the days of [their] probation" (2 Ne. 9:27). Yet some proudly live "without God in the world" (Alma 41:11), with gates and doors locked from the inside!

Mark it down, brothers and sisters, people too caught up in themselves will inevitably let other people down!

Let us adopt the attitude recommended by President Brigham Young: "Say to the fields, . . . flocks, . . . herds, . . . gold, . . . silver, . . . goods, . . . chattels, . . . tenements, . . . possessions, and to all the world, stand aside; get away from my thoughts, for I am going up to worship the Lord" (*Deseret News*, 5 Jan. 1854, 2). There are so many ways to say to the world, "stand aside."

Periodically, husbands and wives can reason together, taking inventory. Minor corrections may be needed, and besides, such conversations can be more precious than we know. Alas, so many couples are too busy.

Moments are the molecules that make up eternity! Years ago, President Hinckley counseled: "It is not so much the major events as the small day-to-day decisions that map the course of our living. . . . Our lives are, in reality, the sum total of our seemingly unimportant decisions and of our capacity to live by those decisions" (*Caesar, Circus, or Christ?* Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year [26 Oct. 1965], 3).

Mercifully, our errors can soon be swallowed up by resilient repentance, showing the faith to try again--whether in a task or in a relationship. Such resilience is really an affirmation of our true identities! Spirit sons and daughters of God need not be permanently put down when lifted up by Jesus' Atonement. Christ's infinite Atonement thus applies to our finite failures! Hence, the pleading of that special hymn:

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
 Prone to leave the God I love;
 Here's my heart, O take and seal it;
 Seal it for thy courts above.
 ("Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," *Hymns* [1948], no. 70)

It also helps in resisting the tugs and pulls of the world if we, though imperfect, know that currently the course of our life is generally acceptable to the Lord (see *Lectures on Faith* [1985], 67). With sufficient dedication, those quiet assurances can come!

The validation of our worth really comes from knowing *who we are*, not solely from *what we do*. Jesus' searching words remain: "What manner of men [and women] ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Ne. 27:27; see also Matt. 5:48; 3 Ne. 12:48).

Of course, worthwhile doing enhances our character and capacity, but mortal circumstances and opportunities differ so greatly. But amid these differences, we can still become more like Christ in our capacity to *be*--more loving, meek, patient, and submissive.

By paying more attention to what *we are* rather than exclusively to what *we do*, our public and our private persons will be the same--the man or the woman of Christ. Our intrinsic value is *not dependent* upon mortal acclaim anyway; in fact, the world may actually see us as weak and foolish (see 1 Cor. 1:27). Countering, however, are divine affirmations, including this one: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:16).

God is infinitely more interested in our having a place in His kingdom than with our spot on a mortal organizational chart. We may brood over our personal span of control, but He is concerned with our capacity for self-control. Father wants us to come home, bringing our real resume, ourselves!

Even so, our mortal jealousies still occur regularly over money, turf, a slight, or the "robes" and the "fatted calf" given to others (see Luke 15:22-23).

True belonging occurs when we know who we are and to whom we really belong! Remember the popular lines in *Fiddler on the Roof* about Anatevka? There, "everyone knows *who* he is and *what* God expects him to *do*" (Joseph Stein, *Fiddler on the Roof* [1964], 3; emphasis added), to which might be added "and what God expects him to *be*."

Yes, we are free to choose the mortal perks with their short shelf life. However, ahead lies that great moment when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ! (See Mosiah 27:31; D&C 88:104). Then the galleries and the mortal thrones will be empty. Even the great and spacious building will fall--and resoundingly! (see 1 Ne. 8:26-28). Then, too, those who have lived without God in the world will confess that God is God! (see Mosiah 27:31). Meanwhile, His character and attributes should evoke adoration and emulation from us.

Isn't it marvelous, brothers and sisters, that God, *who knows everything*, still spends time listening to our prayers? Compared to that cosmic fact, what does the world really have to offer us? One round of applause, one fleeting moment of adulation, or an approving glance from a phantom Caesar?

May God bless us to see things as they really are and as they really will be (see Jacob 4:13; D&C 93:24), and may we give the glory and honor and praise unto God, which I now do. In the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen!

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