

Autobiographical Notes

Building Sand Castles in a Sandbox

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By early to mid August I arrived at the close of the Book of Mormon. I was saddened because my time in the inspiring worship setting I had known in journeying through it had come to an end. I knew I would miss the prayer time and adoration of the goodness of God I had tasted while reading. And so I was faced with a question. What next? What should I do in response to all that I had read and experienced? How could I continue in the presence of the Spirit of truth who had led me in this journey?

On the morning of Saturday, August 17, 1974, I was confronted with an incredible vision that accentuated this growing question of my heart. I had awoken early and gone into my parent's living room to sit on the couch and play my sister's guitar. A song that had been quietly yet steadily forming in my thoughts for sometime began to spring from my lips. Though I do not recall ever having expressed them before, like a plant that was beginning to give bud, I found myself singing words that went something like the following.

“I looked up in the sky,
Wanting to know where my life was.
Wanting to know where my life was.

“Then I beheld Him,
Standing there,
With outstretched arms He beckoned me...”

As I sang, the sight of my natural eyes faded and a spiritual view opened before me. To my amazement I saw Jesus Christ standing in the heavens with outstretched arms. He appeared in the air amid sunshine and clouds, and I could not tell if He were my size or if the reach of His outstretched arms could span all eternity.

My attention was soon drawn to the robe He wore. It was not a robe I would have imagined Jesus Christ wearing when He comes in glory. Rather, it impressed me as the type of robe He would have worn while walking with His disciples during His earthly ministry. As such it seemed to convey the message that there was work to be done, work that I apparently was being called to assist in.^[1]

1 cf. John 5:17 & 14:12

Immediately upon coming to this realization another scene opened to my view. Below the Lord sat a man in a small sandbox dressed in a navy blue three piece business suit. He was building sand castles! “How ridiculous!” I thought to myself.

I no longer had this thought than I realized that the man sitting there was me in some future day. This realization gripped me, and immediately I found myself in the position of sitting cross-legged in the sandbox dismayed and confused. In this stunned state I began letting the sand sift through my fingers. “What am I doing?!?” I chided myself. Right at that moment I heard the Lord calling to me, asking “Won't you go and work for me today?” As if a reflex, from somewhere deep within me came the honest answer of my soul:

"Can't I play a little longer?"

This answer both shocked me and greatly disappointed me at the same time. Though I wanted to, I knew I couldn't deny these words as being my own. They belonged to me. They conveyed the true and honest answer of my heart. Knowing this was, or would be, my response to the Lord's calling upon my life brought immediate shame. These few words had revealed where I placed my values. They had borne a witness of the degree to which I was (or would be) devoted to the Lord in my life. (This experience also taught me that the Lord's presence causes the truth about a given circumstance or matter to be plainly manifest.)

Since there was no hiding from the Lord and the truth these words revealed, I hung my head fully expecting that this insult would surely cause Him to turn from me. After all, His work of salvation and redemption is of the greatest worth because He paid the highest price possible to seal its efficacy, His life.^[2] How then could I have responded to my Lord as if I would rather *play* than be whole heartily engaged in His work?

To my further astonishment, however, Jesus did not turn away from me. He did not leave as I expected Him to do. He was still standing there, still calling me to the work. “Why?” I wondered to myself. Hadn't He heard my response to His holy calling upon my life? Why wouldn't He be offended enough to turn away from me? Since that time, I have come to more confidently abide in the assurance that our God is not a petty or punitive God. Notwithstanding my folly, His face is set on His work of redemption, including that of my own.

The vision ended and I began praying with all my heart that the time I had just been shown would never come, that I would never respond to my Lord in that way. Still, the gravity of the moment told me the Lord had shown me the truth, that this would indeed be my response to His calling on my life.^[3] Stated plainly, I would not place His work as my utmost priority, but would allow other things to draw my devotion and energies away from completing it. I would want to *play* when there was much to be done.

And so I earnestly prayed all the more that I would be brought to repentance and to attend to my duties, both presently and in the future. While in prayer, the Lord assured me that, because He cared for me, He would be with me in the work to which He had called me. But I was also assured that I must not be careless with His precious favor.^[4] As He has taught me, diligence is the watchword of the faithful heart.

Later that same weekend (August 17, 1974) I traveled with other youth and a few adults from the Southeast Colorado and Western Kansas Districts to Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa, for

2 D&C 16:3c

3 cf. Isaiah 46:9,10 & John 14:29

4 D&C 63:1

Sports Spectacular – a week-long event including athletic activities for high school age youth. On Thursday, August 22, of that week I flew back to Colorado for my oldest sister’s wedding. Before leaving for the airport that day I shared a testimony about the sandbox vision in the morning prayer service in the MSC Great Room at Graceland. If I remember correctly, there were over 700 youth present and three priesthood members presiding over the service.

Years later, shortly after my family and I moved to Wichita, Kansas, in 1989, I met one of the men who presided over that service, Lee Abramson, a former appointee to the church. On November 5, 1989, he visited in my home with my father-in-law, Ron Gamble. As we talked at breakfast Sunday morning of that weekend, I felt impressed that I should share this testimony with him. After I did, Lee said he actually remembered my sharing the same testimony that first time in 1974 at Graceland College, and bore witness that he was confident my testimony was true. Though Lee has chosen a path I have not been able to travel with him on, I nonetheless appreciate the witness God gave him and his sharing it with me at a crucial time in my life.