

HEART
— OF THE —
MATTER

WHAT 100 YEARS OF LIVING
HAVE TAUGHT ME

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INTRODUCTION

Now that I am in my hundredth year, I have the rare opportunity of reflecting on a century of living.

I was born during the Roaring Twenties, when the world was still emerging from the devastating effects of World War I. I have lived to see far too many other wars, the Great Depression, the rise of terrorism, and even a worldwide pandemic.

Thankfully, I have also witnessed remarkable strides forward for humanity. I marvel at the countless innovations that have transformed the world around me. I remember witnessing the first television broadcasts that were little more than a grainy picture in black and white and then the awe of antibiotics such as penicillin that revolutionized medicine. I have seen everything from the advent of jet engines, radar, and nuclear power to the transformational nature of the transistor and integrated circuits that laid the foundation for the digital age.

HEART OF THE MATTER

In recent years, I have experienced the explosive growth of the Internet and the rise of social media platforms that have fundamentally changed how people communicate and share information. I have seen the world become more interconnected and globalized while also grappling with the challenges these advancements bring. During my life I've seen the automobile industry go from producing Ford's Model T Touring Car to electric vehicles of almost every brand. And now we are becoming acquainted with artificial intelligence and the dramatic leap this innovation represents. These advances are fascinating.

I have witnessed numerous political breakthroughs in my lifetime. I well remember the end of World War II in 1945 and the establishment of the United Nations. I was stirred as the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s brought about much-needed progress toward racial equality in the United States. I traveled frequently throughout Eastern Europe in the 1980s and, like the rest of the world, celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the major advancements throughout Eastern Europe that followed. I have seen the rise and fall of apartheid in South Africa and the subsequent election of Nelson Mandela as that country's first Black president.

These breakthroughs, along with countless others, have shown me that even in the midst of adversity and conflict, humanity has the capacity for growth, understanding, compassion, and progress.

The year I was born, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had a membership just shy of 598,000. There were six operating temples, 90 stakes, 25 missions, and 867 missionaries. President Heber J. Grant was President of the Church. Elder David O. McKay was superintendent of the Sunday School and Elder George Albert Smith was superintendent of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association, both serving in those capacities as Apostles. Clarissa Smith Williams was General President of the Relief Society, Martha

INTRODUCTION

Horne Tingey was General President of the Young Women Mutual Improvement Association, and Louie Bouton Felt was General President of the Primary.

The October 1924 general conference, held just three weeks after I was born, was the first to be broadcast by radio. President Heber J. Grant opened the conference proceedings with the following remarks: “The exercises of today and throughout the conference are to be broadcasted; and it is estimated that in the neighborhood of a million people will be able to hear all that is said, provided they are listening in during the conference sessions. The radio is one of the most marvelous inventions man knows anything about. To have the voice carried for thousands of miles seems almost beyond comprehension.”

General conference is now broadcast to tens of millions of people around the globe. It goes without saying that the Lord’s Church, along with transmission of general conference to the world, has changed dramatically during my lifetime.

I have traveled the earth for many decades now to fulfill various Church leadership responsibilities, visiting at least 135 countries—some of them many times. Through these visits, I have witnessed many of the world’s most dramatic changes firsthand. I have a deep love and respect for the peoples and cultures of the earth who have taught me so much and made my life so much richer.

Frequent travel and assignments internationally propelled me to study languages—seventeen, including English. (I’m still working on English.) For example, years ago when I was serving as General President of the Sunday School, I received an assignment to what was then East Germany. I had never studied German and did not understand anything I heard or read. I remember wondering why so many streets were labeled *Ein Bahn Strasse*, which, I eventually found out, meant “one-way street.” I said to my wife, “I don’t want

to be stupid. I want to understand what I am reading and hearing. If I ever get another assignment to Germany, I am going to be tutored first.” I did, and I was.

Years later, as a General Authority, I was assigned to participate in the Frankfurt Germany Temple dedication and, in one session, I was to lead the Hosanna Shout in Dutch. I went to the First Presidency’s office and asked Brother F. Michael Watson, secretary to the First Presidency, if there had been a mistake in giving that assignment to me. He quickly replied, “Do you want me to ask the First Presidency if they made a mistake?” I understood his message and proceeded to be tutored in the Dutch language to fulfill the assignment. Learning new languages has increased my love for God, for Jesus Christ and His gospel, and for the peoples of various nations.

As I indulge in reflections about my centennial journey, I am grateful to have witnessed a century of unprecedented innovation, and I am optimistic about what the future holds for humanity.

My one-hundredth year of living gives me the chance to reflect on the most pivotal moments of my life. Let me single out three by calling attention to three symbols that represent those important eras or turning points: a library card, the artificial heart-lung machine, and a call to devote my life fully to serving the Lord.

The Library Card

First, the library card. I have always been curious. I have always wanted to understand how things work. As a boy, I obtained my own library card and convinced my mother to let me hop on the streetcar in Salt Lake City and ride it downtown to the library. I wasn’t more than eight or nine years old when I did this on a regular basis.

Once at the library, I would spend hours pulling books from the stacks and devouring them. I read books on the nervous system,

baseball, astronomy, American history, mammals—you name it. I was even intrigued by the Dewey Decimal System used to catalog books, and I memorized it. I'm not sure how many other youth at the time knew the Dewey Decimal System, but I did.

In my teens, I continued going to the library and also spent hours in little glass booths in local music stores listening to classical music. My heart was stirred by “Una Furtiva Lagrima,” *The Pearl Fishers*, and so many others. This was the 1930s, and the Glenn Miller Orchestra, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, and Tommy Dorsey were all the rage. I liked them too, but classical music spoke to my heart, which had been tutored by the sounds of my mother's exquisite soprano voice.

My library card was perhaps my first possession that opened new worlds to me. I loved learning and loved my parents for encouraging me to read and explore the world around me. From those earliest days, they encouraged my voracious thirst for information and knowledge, which continues to this day.

The Heart-Lung Machine

Second, the heart-lung machine.

At age seventeen, I entered the University of Utah. World War II was raging, and every branch of the military needed doctors. That urgency pushed me toward medicine. The war disrupted our lives in countless ways, including changing the school's calendar, which allowed me to work simultaneously on my bachelor's and MD degrees. I received my BA in 1945 and my MD in 1947, at age twenty-two.

I was fortunate to do my internship and postgraduate work at the University of Minnesota, then regarded as one of the most prestigious universities for surgical training. There I was mentored and

tutored by critically acclaimed physiologists, surgeons, researchers, and innovators.

Before going to Minnesota for postgraduate work, I had never considered heart surgery as a profession—because there was no such thing at the time! In fact, in medical school I was taught that I must never touch the human heart or it would stop beating. One of my medical school textbooks, by Theodor Billroth, published in 1913, threatened that “a surgeon who would attempt such an operation should lose the respect of his colleagues.”

The theory was that God had made the body in such a way that the heart was protected with a sternum, so “hands off!”

But then, through a serendipitous sequence of events, something happened that changed the direction of my career and my life. I landed a spot on a research team, led by Dr. Clarence Dennis. This team was striving to build one of the world’s first artificial heart-lung machines. For everyone on that team, this was a giant leap into the unknown. We were developing a machine that would essentially take over a patient’s circulation to allow surgery on a heart that was not beating—even though we still wondered if it were even possible to touch the human heart without permanently damaging it.

There were, of course, many starts, stops, laboratory messes, and false assumptions as we ventured into an entirely new area of medicine. We had no idea about optimum oxygen consumption rates or minimum flow rates or the influence of temperature on the rate of metabolism. It took us a year just to learn how to have blood flow outside of the body without clotting and then make it coagulate again so healing could take place in the surgical incision.

Gratefully, our many early failures were punctuated with periodic successes. Finally, in March 1951, Dr. Dennis and others performed the first open-heart operation on a human being using the

machine our team had built. However, it was not my good fortune to be in the operating room that day.

In the middle of my surgical training, the Korean War began, and because I was highly susceptible to the draft, I enlisted in the army and became a first lieutenant in the army medical corps. I was initially assigned to the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Later I spent time in M.A.S.H. units on the Korean Peninsula. Both of those assignments were highly instructive—and in very different ways.

After fulfilling my military obligation, I spent a year on the Harvard service at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. During that period of surgical training, I felt like a boy on Christmas morning who had just received his first red wagon. The mental stimulation in Boston was fantastic! Surgeons at Mass. General performed operations like an artist paints a portrait. My time there was a prized opportunity to increase my knowledge and exponentially improve my skills as a surgeon. Ultimately, I returned to Minnesota to finish my residency and receive my Ph.D. degree.

I then returned to Utah, where I performed the first open-heart operation west of the Mississippi. That was November of 1955. I was the third surgeon in the United States to perform such an operation successfully. I then continued to teach and practice thoracic and cardiovascular surgery for roughly thirty years. I will say more about lessons learned during those years of surgical discovery throughout this book. Without question, however, my ventures with the heart-lung machine during its earliest stages of development changed the course of my professional life.

A Call to Serve

Third, a call to the ministry.

At age fifty-nine, and without warning, my life changed in a way

I never expected. I was called to serve as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As had every Apostle before me, I left my professional career behind and turned my attention to teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and ministering around the world to others in need. My career had been all about healing diseased hearts. But suddenly I realized that my life would now be devoted to a different—and even more profound—kind of healing of hearts. For forty years now, it has been my focus and joy to teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, which is a gospel of healing wounded hearts—hearts that are filled with grief, confusion, anxiety, or discouragement.

Thus, both my professional and apostolic roles have centered around the heart. Practicing medicine taught me that with even the finest skills a physician or surgeon can acquire, we as mortals have no healing power in and of ourselves. We did not create the body. God did. We must depend upon law—divine law—to know how to tend to the body medically in such a way that the body will heal itself.

I remember how thrilled we were to learn through those early experiments so many decades ago that the heart did not mind being touched. It would keep beating—if we did not violate the laws that govern how it functions. It was the study of medicine that taught me about law—divine law in particular, and the fact that divine law is irrefutable.

A healthy, functioning heart is central to the health and well-being of each of us. However, what I have learned as a servant and witness of Jesus Christ is that a healthy physical heart is only half of our challenge. I take seriously the injunction to love God with all of our hearts, because loving Him is what keeps us vibrant.

The heart is the organ that keeps us alive physically, and it is also the organ that symbolically propels us forward emotionally and

spiritually and gives the greatest meaning to our lives. From my point of view, the heart is at the very heart of everything meaningful in life.

I cannot speak of things of the heart without mentioning my family. My wife Dantzel and I were blessed with a large family—nine daughters and one son. We have fifty-seven grandchildren, 160 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandson—and counting. In 2005 Dantzel passed away suddenly and our family was devastated. She was the heart of our home and family.

Later, I was blessed to marry again, to Wendy Watson, a university professor. She has filled my life with joy and enriched our family in very distinctive ways. I cannot imagine life without her. My treasured family relationships have made life so fulfilling. My family members truly have my heart!

How I Hope This Book Benefits You

In January 2018, at age ninety-three, I was called by the Lord to serve as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This privilege and responsibility has underscored one of the profound learnings that 100 years of living have taught me—that divine laws and truths govern our lives, whether we realize it or not.

The laws or truths I will share in this book are not merely ideas I have studied and examined; they are the very essence of my life's experiences. I have come to depend on these essential laws and principles to improve each day as a man and as a husband; nurture meaningful connections with my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren; become a heart surgeon; build bridges of understanding with people the world over; teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world; lead a religion whose members are found in more than two hundred countries and whose head is

HEART OF THE MATTER

Jesus Christ; and serve the Lord, His people, and the world in more ways than I ever thought possible.

It is these time-honored laws, learned and observed during a century of living, that I would like to share with you in *Heart of the Matter*.