

Seminary Graduation Remarks

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Stephanie Snuffer: Good morning. Okay, I'm working on the assumption that you will participate. Okay, so when I stand here and expect answers, I'll just stand here till I get some answers. All right? So I'm gonna start with a couple of ideas.

I have come to my own personal conclusion through prayer/meditation/answers that the highest form of godliness on the earth is our experience in relationships and our experience in working those relationships out. Because as I try and envision what the promised blessings are in the Hereafter, I have a really hard time doing that because I'm here, and I'm pretty dang happy here. I have a pretty good life. I like my family; we work hard to be, you know, good to one another. That doesn't mean there's not a lot of crap going on, but I'm pretty dang happy here. So when I read scriptural promises of something "better," I cannot **conceive** of what that is because my tiny human brain is incapable of conceiving what that is.

So as I'm trying to figure this out through prayer (and whatever), I'm thinking, "Okay, it's probably..." And I feel like I got an answer, but I'll leave it all up to you—doesn't matter to me—I feel like the answer that I got was relationships and the work of relationships (okay?), which is pretty dang hard.

Okay, so, family being the first and most important relationship, which includes your intimate family and then your extended family. And then it goes out into society, community, friends, whatever, however you identify relationships is fine. But let's say the pinnacle relationship is family. All right, so being in a family is great. But that doesn't mean your family relationships are great. That does not mean your relationships with your parents are great. That doesn't mean your relationships with your siblings are great. (It doesn't mean they're not, but it doesn't mean they are.)

So I have two... I work with a couple of different family dynamics. I have one client who is part of an intact family: siblings, parents, you know, whatever. And this particular person feels like in order to get love from his family, he has to be dissatisfied with himself—okay?—because if he's satisfied with himself, then his parents are worried about him because they're not sharing the same values and stuff. So does that sound like a particularly godly family relationship? No, not really; not really. Okay, I work with another sort of dynamic where four people come in every week, and they pretty much fight themselves silly. Okay, like, I help moderate; I quiet this person down, I let this person talk. I, you know... We talk, we work out... I teach them skills, they learn new family rules, you know? Does that sound like an ideal family relationship? No. The difference is one family relationship is working on the family relationship together. One experience is working just as an individual trying to manage their own personal experiences in this family. Okay? **Lots of work** to still be done ~~if our highest~~ the highest connection we can have to godliness is within our relationships. There's a lot of work to be done in both of these cases. Okay?

So, a few things that people really hate. Mortal human beings really hate vulnerability. They hate self-reflection. They hate accountability. They hate introspection and self-awareness. And we want... We would rather ask ourselves, "Why?" than "What?"—meaning, "Why is this happening to me?" "Why is she mean to me?" "Why do they not like me?" "Why am I so miserable?" instead of saying, "What am I doing to create the circumstances where I feel like crap?" "What am I doing that I cannot get along with my mother?" "What am I doing that I am constantly fighting with my brother?" ...friends, aunts, uncles (I don't care—we all have people). Okay? Human beings hate vulnerability. They hate self-reflection. They hate accountability. They hate introspection and self-awareness. And we REALLY hate agency. We HATE having to **choose for ourselves** how to be. We would rather someone tell us—'cuz that's so much easier! Okay?

So, with that in mind, I'm gonna read a couple Scriptures. Well, I'm not gonna read the Scripture specifically, but I'm gonna talk about the concepts. So, in Moroni 7:9, he talks about... Ahhhhh, what does he talk about, everybody? Charity! Moroni 7:9 (put on my silly glasses because I cannot read), and it says,

*And if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the holy ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must need have charity. For if he have not charity, he is **nothing**; wherefore, he must need have charity. And charity suffereth long, and [it] is kind, and [it] envieth not, and [it] is not puffed up, [it] seeketh not her own, [it] is not easily provoked, [it] think[s] no evil, and [it does not rejoice] in iniquity...[it] rejoice[s] in the truth, [it] bear[s] all things, [and believes] all things, [it] hope[s] all things, [and it] endureth all things. [So] wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, **ye are nothing**, [because] charity never faileth...*

Obviously, I'm not reading this word for word; I'm dramatizing it. Pretty good, huh?

Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all. For all things must fail, but charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endure[s] for ever. And whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with them. (Moroni 7:9, emphasis added)

Okay, so I'm gonna leave that there, and then I'm gonna go to First Corinthians. I believe it's 1:53; I took my marker out, so... First Corinthians—and yes, I'm driving in the car on the way up here, picking apart my stuck-together Scripture pages, because I'm LISTENING to them; I'm not reading them. So all of my pages are still stuck together. 52; let's start with 52; oh, no—let's start with 51. First Corinthians 1:51.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and...angels, and have not charity, I have become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing.

Charity suffers long and is kind. [It] envies not. [It] vaunts not itself, [it] is not puffed up, [it] does not behave itself unseemly, [it] seeks not her own, [it] is not easily

provoked, thinks no evil, rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices in the truth, [it] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, [and] endures all things.

And then the very first sentence in First Corinthians 1:53 is:

Charity never fails. (1 Corinthians 1:51-53)

Okay, let's just put all that aside. Just leave it there for a minute.

Okay, so how much time do you all spend studying the gospel or your Scriptures in any given week?

Speaker 1: Ten minutes a day.

SS: "Ten minutes a day." Okay. Ten minutes a day. So ten minutes a day, 70 minutes a week, maybe? Is that...? Did I do my math correctly? Okay. Anybody else? The answer can be none. I don't care. A lot. Not a lot. [audience answer] "30 minutes a week?" Okay. [audience answer] "40 minutes a week?" Okay. Well, I'm not asking... These aren't guesses—these are literally how much time do you guys spend in your Scriptures or the gospel each week?

Speaker 2: Ten to twenty minutes in the morning.

SS: "Ten to twenty minutes every morning." Okay, so that's like 140 minutes a week. Okay. Roughly two hours. All right. Cool. Like, for me, like, none—like however long it takes me to drive to work and listen to my Scriptures. I don't know.

Okay, how much time... Okay, so when you're doing that, how do you believe your investment in the gospel or the Scriptures impacts your daily life?

Speaker 3: When I start out reading the Scriptures, the whole entire day just feels lighter and easier.

SS: Okay, so it doesn't really matter how much **time** you do it, just if you've started your day with that settled-down space of gospel study, you feel like your day is better. Great.

Speaker 3: Start or end.

SS: Okay, either one. All right. Okay, start or end was that you? Okay? Go ahead.

Speaker 2: I feel closer to God whenever I read.

SS: Okay, "closer to God whenever you read." Can you tell me why?

Speaker 2: Just because I'm in the Scriptures reading His words.

SS: Okay, "in the Scriptures reading His words." Doesn't really matter what the words are, just feels...? Okay, great. Anybody else?

Speaker 5: I'm reading the Bible right now, and so I have a lot of questions... why would that happen? [indecipherable] ... talking to God about it. I'm just very confused.

SS: Okay, so your investment in the Scriptures and gospel creates lots of questions, and you go to God to get those questions answered. Perfect, great. Anybody else?

Speaker 6: I read at night so it gives me something to look forward to.

SS: Nice. Okay, all right. So kind of the gift you give to yourself at the end of the day. Great. Fantastic. Okay.

All right. How much time do you all spend with people who disagree with you? Or who you don't get along with? In a day.

Speaker 3: Eight hours a day.

SS: "Eight hours a day" when you're at work—people who don't like you, don't agree with you, you don't like them, whatever. Great, fantastic. Anybody else?

Unknown: Three to five hours every day...

SS: A day? Fantastic! This is awesome!

Unknown: All day every day.

SS: Nice! "All day every day." Is it the gentleman you're clinging to or is that someone else? Okay, great. Okay, all right. Come on, keep going. This is... [audience answer] "Two to three hours a day?" Okay. With someone who doesn't...who you don't really like, doesn't agree with you? Okay.

How much actual conflict is there? Or is there just this underlying, "Hey, you know, we're on different..." you know?

Speaker 5: I avoid it.

SS: What? "You avoid it." Good. Good. Yeah. Perfect.

Unknown: None.

SS: No conflict. Just an understanding. Okay. All right. Come on, guys. Throw out the conflict.

Speaker 3: 50/50.

SS: "50/50," okay. Yeah?

Unknown: Whenever we're at home together.

SS: "Whenever you're at home together," yes.

Speaker 3: Light debates.

SS: Okay, you **like** debates?

Speaker 3: LIGHT debates.

SS: Oh, light debates. Okay.

Speaker 3: When it gets too deep in doctrine, it kinda breaks apart.

SS: Okay. Okay, great. All right. Your answers are changing (sort of) my approach, but I mean, that's fine. It's just it's gonna go a little bit a different direction. Okay. All right. So how many of you... Okay, so I may have made...

How relevant do you feel like the Scriptures are to your everyday life? Like legitimately relevant?

Unknown: Very close.

SS: You think the Scriptures are very closely relevant to your daily life. Do tell.

Unknown: Uh, I guess... I'm in Mosiah [indecipherable] ...kingdom, trying to teach people. It's like, I go to work every morning, "Oh, I'm Mormon." I was going on my mission. "Do you want to talk about Scriptures?" And he was like, "No." [indecipherable]

SS: Okay, yeah. Perfect. Anybody else?

Speaker 4: I try to read it like you're the character, like you're in that situation. You can see a lot of similarities. I feel like it's very relevant, especially when you put yourself into their situation.

SS: Okay, give me an example. (Hang on; just hold that thought.) Give me an example. Because I am NOT Lehi's wife, Sariah. I'm just not. Okay, go ahead.

Speaker 4: I don't know, like Jared and the brother of Jared, when he didn't know he was a prophet, he still did stuff.

SS: Okay.

Speaker 4: Yeah, we're doing stuff and we don't see that, or we don't...

SS: Perfect, great.

Speaker 3: When I feel like when I read the Scriptures, I start noticing the things that I read in my everyday life a lot more. Such as like when you read about the dove, you start noticing doves. When you start reading about charity, then you start noticing charity in your everyday life.

SS: Okay, great.

Speaker 5: Sometimes I find it hard to relate it because we live in such a different time that the struggles are different, but I think the themes are similar, but it's kind of hard to relate when we're **driving** to work, and they spent six weeks traveling to a different city, you know?

SS: Yeah, right. Or you know, however long in boats with no light or whatever. Exactly. Okay, anybody else? I feel like I'm in school, like, the good kids... Like there are like four kids who have all the answers. Speak up! I'm a mean teacher. I call on people who keep their eyes down and their heads... You know that no eye contact thing? That doesn't work for me. So everybody stare, so I don't choose you. Okay? All right.

Um, well, since you guys aren't providing me with exactly what I need, I'm gonna have to offer it up myself. I find... Okay, I've spent the last several years sort of pursuing education in a different path. What... And I've mentioned this before, but everything that I have read, everything that I've learned, all of my textbooks, everything that I've invested in SCREAMS gospel principles to me, okay? But it doesn't scream them by, like, in reading the Scriptures. It's just totally... It's a total different... It's a completely different language.

In my world, the only thing I can say is mental health or the pursuit of mental wellness (which includes relationships and personal accountability and motivation and all of those kinds of things) is just another language that the gospel is spoken in. Okay? But it's useful for people who don't believe in a God or to who don't believe in church or religion or something like that. It's just a secular language to teach people gospel principles. And for the most part, they really get down to the nitty-gritty of your daily life. Okay? So, we are gonna... I'm gonna take a minute... I probably jumped ahead. I'm gonna take a minute, and we're gonna talk just briefly about... Was it *tzedakah*, (as in "Neil")?

Denver Snuffer: Yes.

SS: Okay. So, the Hebrew word for charity is *tzedakah*. And it has... Okay, I have this... Oh, go ahead...

[Audience member asking how to spell *tzedakah*]

Oh, T-Z-E-D-A-K-A-H.

DS: That spelling is the phonetic way of rendering a Hebrew word. There's actually a Hebrew letter that is that TZ.

SS: Yeah. Yeah. It's, I mean, I could of... I just chose... I'm gonna do charity and love both in the Hebrew, okay? So, and it came off a... You know, I mean, it just... I just Googled it. It just came off a "Judaism 101" board. Okay? So, I'm not trying to be particularly... This is just... I want to throw something out there. Yeah.

Unknown: I heard you really well for the first time when you spelled the Hebrew word.

SS: Oh, okay. You want me to do this? Oh, fantastic. That's okay. Okay.

So, all right. The idea of charity being something that you, you know, like giving your excess to somebody else, you know, helping, giving, whatever—I want to just sort of not flip it, but I want to add to it.

So, traditional Jews give at least 10% of their income to charity. And the... Okay, hang on. I want to find a... *Tzedakah* is the Hebrew word for the acts that we call "charity" in English:

giving aid, assistance, and money to the poor and needy or to other worthy causes. However, the nature of tzedakah is very different from the idea of charity. The word “charity” suggests benevolence and generosity; a magnanimous act by somebody who has more to somebody who has less. It is derived from the Hebrew root word *Tzadei-Dalet-Qof* (you could probably do that better than I could, Denver), meaning righteousness, justice, or fairness. So in the Jewish tradition, giving to the poor is not viewed as generous, magnanimous, or something that you're doing to be benevolent; it is an act of justice and righteousness. Therefore, it is a duty. It is a duty. You are doing it because it is your godly obligation. Okay? Now, if you want to talk about giving **stuff** away, that's fine. That's, you know, it's like give 10% of tithing, etc. But take it out of stuff and think about it in terms of relationships and what you give in relationships—and it is your duty. (I can't control this [the mic], the way this thing works.) It is your duty to give to someone who needs from you, okay?

All right, then I'm gonna go to love. (Same... It's a different website, but it's the same idea. It's just a Jewish...) Understanding the concepts of love... Understanding the concepts that are invested in words helps us in our lives. As an interesting example, the word “love,” which is thrown about so freely in English, has a special meaning in Hebrew: *ahava*, which is made up of three basic letters. The three letters are broken down into two parts (which is written here in front of me). The meaning of the two-letter base is “to give.” Love, to give. The letter “aleph,” which precedes these two letters, comes to modify the meaning of the base word give: **I** give. So if we just settle right there with charity and love—okay?—how much of your day (Scripture, engagement with people, gospel study, whatever it is you do) do you feel like you are actively participating in charity and love? Intentionally participating, making it an act or acts or investment that you set aside time for?

Speaker 6: Sometimes. Not like every day, but when I remember to, like, actively think about it, like what can I do for someone else, like everyone else (even if they don't know it) for God?

SS: Yeah. Yeah. Anybody else?

Speaker 7: I remember a lot better the times that I don't feel charity or love or that I don't show it. I don't know, that's what I remember to [indecipherable], I guess.

SS: Yeah. So tell me about that.

Speaker 7: Umm, I don't know. Experience is, like, it works. Sometimes I'll think something about somebody; they act in a certain way, and I react in a way that isn't necessarily [indecipherable], I'm not showing that, and I think, “Crap.” Again, I just got to rewire that brain because I screwed up again. And so, I don't know, it's hard.

SS: Yeah, I'm gonna... “Screwed up”—no, not so much; just acted very human, right? Yeah. Okay. So when you want to go out and learn about a gospel topic, where do you go? [audience answer] The Scriptures. All right. When you want to learn about a relationship topic, where do you go?

Unknown: The Scriptures.

SS: Really? Yeah, that's great. What do you learn about relationships in the Scriptures?

Unknown: You can see in the Scriptures that parts that there's love and chastity.

SS: Yeah. Yeah. Anybody else?

Unknown: I go to my parents.

SS: You go to your parents, okay.

Unknown: Friends.

SS: Friends. And how... What are we learning from parents and friends about relationships?

Speaker 1: What not to do.

SS: "What not to do." Here's the thing. You can't... (You can, but you can't.) You can't just sit around and say, "It'll all work out." You can't. Because if you pray and get a confirmation that I am right (that the highest way to connect with Heaven on Earth is in the work of relationships), then you have to **work on relationships**. And you can't just say, "Oh, it's okay. I don't need to do anything different because it's not BAD." Well, *not being bad* is very different than being good. *Not being bad* and complacency within that relationship tells me that we're scared; we don't want to be vulnerable; we don't want to ask for our needs to be met; we don't want to meet someone halfway; ~~we feel like we don't~~ we feel like we're not good enough; we feel like it's too hard.

You know, I have this, I just kind of have this thing at my house: One of my kids will come, and they'll tell me something that one of their siblings did to upset them, and I say, "Did you talk to them?" And they say, "It's not that big a deal." And I say, "You told ME. It's got to be a big enough deal that you told me." Because there's something going on there that is making the relationship less than ideal.

So I would contend that there are principles in the Scriptures that are fantastic—okay?—universal, certainly the basis upon which we want to live our lives. And I think studying the Scriptures and the gospel is an absolute imperative. It is a necessity. It is how we... It's starting out our day; it brings us closer to God; it increases opportunity for question because you're reading, and you're, like, "I totally don't get this. This doesn't make any sense to me." And I would suggest that to the extent that it is possible, you go directly to God instead of to somebody else who might be able to give you an answer—but it will be **their** answer. And even if it is a right answer, it will still be their answer. Okay? And I think that is absolutely important.

But I don't think there's anything in the Scriptures that tells us how Lehi and Sarah managed their little conflict when she was crabbing up a storm about him sending out the boys to go find the plates, and he's going, "Sweetheart, I have to do this," and she's going, "You are crazy! They are gonna get killed," you know, and there's this relationship conflict that never gets addressed. Because what? We think: "They're scriptural," so somehow they don't have problems? Nephi and his brothers HATED one another. They were murderous,

fratricidal... Joseph's brothers threw him in a pit (to be charitable!!), then decided that it was better if they just sell him to the passing caravan. Okay? These people have **horrible relationships**. I know there's context. I know there's things I don't understand. I get it. I can't know all of the pieces. But my brain works from a relational standpoint. Okay?

What kind of gods and goddesses, priests and priestesses, Mothers and Fathers in Heaven do we attain unto if we're not willing to do the work of relationships down here? How do you picture your heavenly parents? Are they like your parents? Wait, what? Are you kidding me? If my kids hold ME up as their model as what their heavenly parents are, that's kind of scary.

[audience comment about the microphone]

Oh, my gosh. Okay.

Any answers? What... I mean, do we think about that? Do we have any idea what it takes to be the kind of person in a relationship who attains unto **godhood**? It doesn't just happen, people. There has to be some **work**. And the work is in your relationships. To the extent that the Scriptures help you help inform you of how to become a better person, they are of **immeasurable** value. To the extent that the Scriptures are a way that you avoid being in relationships, to the extent that you use the gospel and study of the gospel as a way to tell yourself that "you're doing okay" but your relationships suck—not so good. **There has to be work done here.**

When was the last time anybody learned anything about motivation from the Scriptures? (Oh, you should all raise your hand. There's plenty of motivation in the Scriptures—plenty of it.) Okay? When was the last time you learned about accountability in the Scriptures? Again, plenty of it. Okay? When was the last time you learned about empathy in the Scriptures? Again. Perspective-taking? Yeah, it's all in there. But it's all in there as a story and words on the page. It's not necessarily being applied to your daily life. Okay?

So I would suggest that the fact that you go to the Scriptures to find answers to the gospel questions is a model you should follow to go somewhere else—and it can be an Internet search; it can be a book; it can be a magazine—to find out how to communicate better with the people in your life. You know there's actual real ways to communicate, and it's not okay just to say, "Oh, it'll be fine." You know there are actual ways to listen—right?—that actually improve the way you communicate and, therefore, improve your relationships. All of this stuff is available, but it's not available in its best applicable form in the Scriptures—those are "big picture" ideas; they need to be brought out, and then you need to say, "Hmm, how do I apply charity?"

Okay, that's the question I want an answer to, "How do you apply charity in your real-world life—separate and apart from giving stuff to people." I can tell you how I do it. I have multiple bags of DI stuff sitting in my hallway upstairs. That's how I do it. I carry money around with me so I can give it to strangers on the street. Easy peasy. Super easy. That does not challenge me **one bit**.

Unknown: Like, not snapping back at people, like, at work or like, don't turn around and walk away, mumbling [indecipherable], like, get angry at him and stuff.

SS: Exactly. Exactly.

Unknown: Taking the time to understand their perspective...

SS: "Taking the time to understand their perspective."

Speaker 3: Even if it's just the time that I spend with someone because you can give time just as much as you can give anything else.

SS: Yes, exactly.

Speaker 7: Measuring your words, and thinking about what you're saying before...

SS: Yeah. Yeah. What else?

Unknown: I even think if you're just thinking about someone and you reach out to them and let them know that, like, you care.

SS: Yeah, exactly. Okay, I'm gonna wind down.

- How many in here fight with your parents? [hands go up] (I don't think that's enough, but okay. That's fine.)
- How many in here fight with your siblings? Oh, more! Wowzers!
- How many in here have actual unresolved issues with people you actually love? Whoa. Yeah, we do!
- How many of you are avoiding unresolved issues with people you love? Whoo! Yeah. Okay?

Yeah, that's what we do. Do you know why we do that? Because we hate vulnerability. We hate self-reflection. We hate authenticity. We hate being accountable. We hate it. It hurts. It's so painful.

(What are you doing??!)

Things have to be balanced. There are multiple ways to attain...

(What are you doing?? [laughing] I'm done.)

DS: I'm sitting behind you.

SS: There... We have a... There's a lot of work to do. There's a lot of work to do in understanding gospel principles. There's a lot of work to do in studying your Scriptures. If studying Scriptures is not your jam, no big deal—there's a lot of work in relationships; there's a lot of work in just trying to come to a place where you can say, "Who am I? And how am I in relationships? And how can I use the gospel? How can I use the Scriptures? How can I use other resources? How can I use other people to fill in the gaps that the Scriptures do not provide me?"

We have an ongoing conversation where all the gospel knowledge in the world (this is not me; this is Paul)... I don't care if you can move mountains. I don't care if you can speak with tongues. I don't care. God doesn't care. Paul didn't care. If you don't have charity and love—which is WORK—you are **nothing**.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.