

Where Are You Going?

VICTOR L. BROWN

My dear brothers and sisters, I am happy to be with you this beautiful Sabbath evening. I pray that my message may be helpful and uplifting to you.

At some time in everyone's life, these questions arise: "Who am I? Where did I come from? And where am I going?" The answers are found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The latter question, "Where am I going?" is the one I would wish to address tonight. My prayer is that this may influence each of you to gain a greater desire than you presently have to live worthy of achieving eternal life. For this is where you may go—where you *may* go. This is the greatest gift of God to His children, for He said, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

May I underline further: "For this is where you *may* go." The decision as to whether you go there is yours and yours alone. Everyone will gain immortality through the sacrifice of the Savior, but eternal life is another matter. What we do with our lives will determine the outcome. Inasmuch as we must individually earn this great reward the only help we may receive from others is the influence they exert in our lives.

Much of the inspiration that influences my life comes from the lives of others. Let me tell you of one such example; she was a nine-year-old girl. The story was told me by my brother, the presiding judge of the family court. He was sitting on a child custody case in which a father was suing for the custody of his daughter. She did not want to live with him; she was frightened of him. She was being reared by her aunt. After listening to the arguments on the case from the various attorneys, the judge decided he wanted to get a bit better acquainted with this little girl; so he invited her to the privacy of his chambers—just the gray-haired judge in his judicial robes and a little nine-year-old black girl.

He asked her, "Who do you love more than anyone else in the world?" She did not respond. He tried again. "Do you love your grandmother more than anyone else in the world?"

She said, "Nope."

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"Your grandfather?"

"Nope."

"Your auntie?"

"Nope."

"Who do you love more than anyone else in all the world?"

And this little nine-year-old girl said, "I love Lord Jesus more than anyone else in the world. Would you mind if I speak to Lord Jesus?"

The judge said, "You go right ahead."

So she pushed her chair back from his desk and knelt down and said, "Lord Jesus, will you please bless Mr. Judge Brown so he'll know what's best for me." Touched by the faith of this little girl, the judge was more secure in rendering a wise decision.

When each of us really loves the Savior more than anyone else in the world, and that love is thoroughly tested, we will be able to respond to the petition, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Recently I met a young medical doctor who was completing his medical training as an intern in a hospital. He told us of himself as he bore his testimony in a stake conference. He said that as a young athlete he had set his sights very high. At only thirteen years of age he had started swimming competitively, and during his teen years he spent thirty to forty hours a week training during the summer and twenty to thirty hours a week in the winter. He told us that his desire to become a champion swimmer was so great that he would have done anything to accomplish it. His grades were not what they should have been, and the coach cautioned him; whereon he applied himself and brought them to a satisfactory level. During this period of time he excluded himself from Church activity because, in his words, "Swimming would improve my self-image and give me confidence and the Church would not."

He went on to become a national AAU champion, winner of a bronze medal in the

1968 Olympics, and an All-American in college for three years. Again in his words:

I did well in college and was able to go to medical school. I would tell myself, "You are an Olympian; you have a good mind; you will become a doctor and have 'the good life.'" I would tell myself this as I was contemplating suicide. I was full of false and vain pride.

In medical school I dealt with an indigent population. The people were completely different from me; they frustrated me terribly. I dealt with these frustrations first by hating the people, then by pitying them. As a medical student I frequently thought of taking my own life.

A country doctor in southeastern Ohio, with whom I lived for six weeks, talked to me about my family, about returning to my religious heritage and honoring my mother and father. He asked that sometime before I left we pray together. We did, and we started reading the Bible together.

I went back to Cincinnati, feeling very sure I could understand any work of literature, and started reading the Bible by myself. I was halfway through Genesis and was learning very little when I said to myself, "There must be chapters written in a way that will be easier to understand." I then turned to Numbers and found that I understood even less. I stopped reading and started praying.

He then went on to tell that he fell in love with a lovely young woman, and they were married. This improved the way he felt about himself and gave him time to think about a future family and how to maintain a good family life. Again in his own words: "I knew that the Church helped tremendously in keeping family ties close. I didn't really want to have to spend the time required to be a good Latter-day Saint. I was hoping to find another church whose gospel was easier to live and didn't ask so much."

He further stated that as they were driving west to take up residence, they were discussing the subject of raising their children; and his

wife, though not a member of the Church suggested that the children be raised in the Mormon Church. He had hoped that she would wait for a while, as he was going to start his internship and knew he would be extremely busy.

By chance they moved next door to an active Latter-day Saint family—and, I might say, they were in a non-LDS community. He then explained,

The first question they asked us was if we would like to go to church with them on Sunday. Not being able to think of a good excuse, we went. Through this experience my testimony started to grow, first by studying and praying and listening to the testimonies of our stake missionaries. But the fastest growth in my testimony came from the opportunities I had to serve other people.

About six months ago, he was ordained an elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood, and he told of an experience that happened shortly after his ordination. His elders quorum president called him at 5:30 a.m., just before he was to begin a thirty-six-hour call day at the hospital, and asked him if he would please go over to the hospital early to give a blessing to a woman who was about to give birth to a child. His first reaction was, “Why me? I’ll lose an hour and a half of sleep.” But he got up and dressed. Realizing that he was not in the proper frame of mind to give a blessing, he knelt and prayed, searching for the proper spirit. Then he said that as he walked to the hospital “the sun was just coming up on a beautiful new day. When I got to the bedside I saw a beautiful mother about to give birth to a beautiful spirit. After the blessing I thanked the Lord for preparing me.”

Do you recognize the miraculous transformation that had taken place in this young man’s life? He had finally achieved a relationship with the Savior. His priorities and values had changed so as to turn his life completely

around. As he said, he finally recognized his former self as one of the foolish men spoken of in 2 Nephi:

O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. [2 Nephi 9:28]

He finally recognized that in order to achieve eternal life his relationship with his Heavenly Father was of paramount importance.

A few months ago I was in a distant area of the Church. A fine-looking young man came up to me and said somewhat impatiently, “Bishop Brown, how long does it take, anyway, to process a mission call?” I said that I was not sure but I did not think it would be too long. We had a short, very pleasant visit. Afterward I asked the stake president about him. He seemed so desirous of serving a mission, and yet he appeared to be older than most prospective missionaries; he appeared to be in his mid- or late twenties.

The stake president informed me that at one time this young man had been acknowledged as one of the top three drummers in the leading rock bands of the United States. He had previously recorded with Columbia Records and had made a lot of money. He had been totally involved in that scene. One day, he put a gun to his mouth and pulled the trigger. It went off but, miraculously, did not kill him. During his convalescence, he learned of the gospel. He was converted and baptized and now was preparing himself to go on a mission.

He now had an understanding of eternal life. The contrast between his earlier life and now caused many things of the world to seem hollow and meaningless. With this new light and knowledge the things of God were rich

and rewarding, and now his whole desire was to achieve eternal life and influence the lives of others so that they would have the same desire.

The story is told of a very wealthy man who had a lovely family of seven children and who was living a righteous life. Because of adversity, he lost his wealth. His children died. His wife turned against him, and his friends made light of him. His body was racked with illness. His soul was tormented—and yet, because he desired to return to the presence of his Heavenly Father above all else, he kept the faith. After all this, he said:

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: . . .

All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils;

My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.

God forbid that I shall justify you [speaking of his critical friends]: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. [Job 19:25–26; 27: 3–5]

This evidence of what can happen when the desire to achieve eternal life is sufficiently embedded in our souls.

As you recognize, the story of Job happened centuries ago. Let me tell you of one that happened just a few years ago. I was attending a stake conference; and on Saturday afternoon between meetings, when we normally have a bite to eat, the stake president asked if he might be excused to visit his wife in the hospital. This was the first I knew that she was ill. Upon further inquiry I found that she was critically ill. As a matter of fact, the doctors indicated that she had just a few more hours to live. I, of course, told the stake president that he was excused from any further responsibilities for the conference, whereupon he said his wife had told him that his responsibility at that time was to carry out his priesthood obligation

and that she preferred that he attend to his stake conference responsibilities.

He went to the hospital and then returned to our seven o'clock meeting. At the conclusion of this meeting, he went back to the hospital and stayed all night by her bedside. He arrived promptly at our meeting Sunday morning and delivered an unusually fine address to the members of the stake. The only time his emotions broke—and then just slightly—was when I suggested that for the intermediate song we sing “I Need Thee Every Hour.”

After the conference was over, I went alone to the hospital to meet a woman who so loved the Lord and her husband as to encourage him to honor his priesthood even under the most trying of circumstances. As I came to her room, I was greeted by her returned missionary son who was by her side. She seemed to be sleeping, so I left. As I returned to my car, her son hurried after me and said that she had roused and asked if I would come back to give her a blessing.

As I walked into her room, I saw lying on the bed a lovely, beautiful young mother. I do not think she had any gray hair. She had a lovely smile on her face, even though she was so sick. When I expressed my admiration for her faith and reminded her of the blessings she had in store in heaven, she smiled and said, “Bishop Brown, it isn’t always easy, but the Lord truly blesses us.”

This good woman had gone through all of the anguish and difficulties of a long siege of cancer, including many operations. Her life was ebbing very rapidly; and yet under these circumstances, realizing full well that it would not be very long before she would face the sorrow of leaving a lovely family, she had the faith and the strength to encourage her husband to do his duty—which really means that she was influencing him in an unusual way to order his life so that he, too, would achieve eternal life.

The next morning early she quietly passed away. As a righteous wife and mother, she

had qualified herself to enjoy the blessings of eternal life. She truly loved the Lord and had proven her love after deep trial, as had Job.

I have often wondered if the challenge of life in ancient times was really much different from that of today. Certainly the relationship of God to his children is unchanging. His work and his glory have not changed. I suppose Satan's influence changes little, except that it seems to become stronger.

Remember that in the days of King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, the king was wont to have dreams. A young Jewish captive was given by the Lord the interpretation of one of the king's dreams, and was thus brought to his attention. King Nebuchadnezzar, in showing his gratitude, "made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon" (Daniel 2:48). At Daniel's request, three of his friends were also raised to high positions in the kingdom—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Others of the powerful men had a graven image made and by the direction of the king a decree went out that at a given hour each day all should bow down and worship this graven image. "And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace" (Daniel 3:6). These young men refused to bow down, and their enemies came before the king to accuse them, saying:

There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. [Daniel 3:12–18]

As these last verses indicate, these three men knew that their God could deliver them if it were His will to do so, but there was no guarantee. Even if he chose not to spare their lives, they made it clear to the king that they would suffer death before giving lip service to the golden image.

Except for details, is the experience of these young men much different from those of today? Not long ago I visited with a young man who had gone through the fiery furnace of hell. He had filled a mission for the Church, had been a leader in the mission field. After returning home he had succumbed to the temptations of Satan. His golden image was lust and passion. He was excommunicated from the Church. Now, after five years of wrestling with Satan for his eternal soul, he was ready to step out of the furnace, perhaps not free of all signs of the heat of the furnace. Nevertheless, because of the love of God for him and through the blessing of the law of repentance and forgiveness, he once again was to be given the opportunity to earn his place

in eternal life. Had he not walked into Satan's domain, he would have been spared the anguish and pain of possibly losing his eternal soul.

Brother Truman Madsen, in a devotional address here on the campus, told of three young men with the pioneers in their trek west who had the same faith as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—

Brother Huntington, Brother Grant, Brother Kimball—all only eighteen years of age, who went with the relief party the second thousand miles to help with the Martin company. On this trip they faced a stream that was swollen with ice and snow. . . . The pioneers almost hopelessly stood back, unable to go through in their weakened and emaciated condition. Those three boys carried every one of the company across and then crossed back, sometimes in water up to their waists. All three later died from exposure. When Brother Brigham heard this, he wept and then rose in the majesty of his spirit and said, "God will exalt those three young men in the celestial kingdom of God." [Truman G. Madsen, "Power from Abrahamic Tests," October 12, 1971, p. 4]

Let us now return to the story of Daniel. Later in his history, in the days of King Darius, Daniel still held a high position in the kingdom. In fact, "the king thought to set him over the whole realm." The other leaders, jealous of his power, plotted to have a decree signed that for thirty days no one could call upon any god or man save it were the king. If anyone did so, he was to be thrown to the lions. The scriptures clearly state that Daniel knew of this decree, and he knew the king had signed it. Yet he still prayed to the Lord regularly—three times a day. Those who spied upon him and caught him praying brought him before the king and forced the king to fulfill the punishment set out in the decree. Daniel was put into the den of lions. He had refused to compromise principles even though there was tremendous pressure to

do so—pressure even to the point of forfeiting his life.

The next morning, however, as you are aware, "Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God." By remaining steadfast, he brought recognition to himself as well as to his God. The king sent out a decree that all men should recognize the God of Daniel as the living God (see Daniel 6:1–26). What might have happened had Daniel succumbed just once to the pressures of men?

Again, is this so different from today's realities? Has there ever been more pressure exerted by evil and designing men on those searching for righteousness than in our day—pressure that would lead mankind from the pathway to eternal life to the pathway of eternal damnation?

What, then, do we do to inherit eternal life? In Luke we read:

And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, that is God.

Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.

And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.

Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. [Luke 18:18–25]

Further, from the scriptures we read: “Seek not for riches but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich” (D&C 6:7).

And again from Luke:

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou?

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.

And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of all his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him,

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves?

And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then Jesus said unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. [Luke 10:25–37]

Time will not permit discussion of other laws, the obedience to which is essential to achieve eternal life. It is the responsibility of each of us to study the scriptures and learn the message they carry. In conclusion, let me quote from one of President McKay’s general conference sermons:

The responsibility is upon each individual to choose the path of righteousness, of faithfulness, and duty to fellow men. If he choose otherwise and as a result meets failure, misery, and death, he alone is to blame. President Brigham Young, speaking on this thought once said:

“If Brother Brigham should take a wrong track and be shut out of the kingdom of heaven, no person will be to blame but Brother Brigham. I am the only being in heaven, earth, or hell, that can be blamed. This will equally apply to every Latter-day Saint. Salvation is an individual operation. I am the only person that can possibly save myself. When salvation is sent to me, I can reject or receive it. In receiving it, I yield implicit obedience and submission to its great Author throughout my life, and to those whom he shall appoint to instruct me; in rejecting it, I will follow the dictates of my own will in preference to the will of my Creator.” [Conference Report, April 1957, pp. 7–8]

It is my humble prayer, my brothers and sisters, that each of us will gain a sufficient desire to do what is necessary—each individually—to be worthy of the greatest of all gifts of God to us and to all of His children, that of eternal life. I bear my witness that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that this is His church over which He presides through a living prophet, President Spencer W. Kimball. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.