

The Four Steps on the Stairway to Heaven

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As an adjunct professor who has taught at BYU for several years, I am in awe of this amazing institution that attracts the finest, most extraordinary faculty and students on the planet.

I honor you and believe that King Benjamin could have easily been describing you when he said:

And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual. [Mosiah 2:41]

Yes, you are awesome, and this could be the most important assignment I have ever had as a professional speaker. Consequently, I wanted to be at my best.

However, as I was getting ready this morning, I noticed that I was losing hair on my head and growing it in my nose and ears and on my back—in places I don't even need it. That is not a fair trade-off. My only hope this morning was that the hair in my right ear would grow long enough so that I could comb it up over the top of my head and fake all of you out! It didn't happen.

When President Worthen asked me to speak to you today, two life-altering experiences surfaced in my mind, helping me focus my remarks. First, I recently returned from an eighteen-day military tribute tour with my invited guests American Idol finalist/Sony recording artist David Archuleta; world-class musician, vocal coach, and musical director Dean Kaelin; and celebrity impressionist Jason Hewlett. We performed our *Evening of Music, Comedy, and Motivational Theater* to fourteen amazing audiences; held six firesides for the U.S. combat troops in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Bahrain, and Kuwait along the Iraqi border; and concluded the tour with a special visit to the missionaries, members, and investigators in Ethiopia. We were touched by the dedication of Church members and the fearless commitment to service before self of our brave men and women in uniform. And when we got shot at and returned machine gun fire during one of our flights in a Chinook helicopter to a remote forward operating base, I realized that

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we should never take our freedom for granted and was reminded of the sense of urgency with which we all should live our lives.

The second life-altering experience happened on October 23, 2010, when I had the rare opportunity to soar to the edge of space in a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft. Because it was a classified mission, I can only tell you that at 70,000 feet you can see two-thirds of the state of California. At 80,000 feet you can see some distinctly mapped outlines of America. And at 90,000 feet you tear up and feel like you can reach out and touch the face of God! It was a spiritual experience I wish each of you could have.

For four hours I sat in the sounds of silence, looking at the breathtaking curvature of the earth, gazing into the endless blackness of space, pondering eternity, and reflecting on President Dieter F. Uchtdorf's reminder that we are more than just mortal beings living on a small planet for a short season (see "You Matter to Him," *Ensign*, November 2011, 22).

Through this experience I became an eyewitness to the words of Alma: "For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors" (Alma 34:32).

Through fasting and prayer I have chosen this scripture as the text for my remarks, and I will use the four transformational words in it as my template: *life*, *time*, *prepare*, and *perform*. I have affectionately named them "The Four Steps on the Stairway to Heaven."

Life

The United States Declaration of Independence states that we "are endowed by [our] Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." This makes life sound like an exciting, fulfilling adventure that should be relatively easy, right? But as a two-time bishop for young single adults, I learned

firsthand that many of you are making life way too hard. Simplifying your life and creating the happiness you dream of and deserve is about attracting and maintaining good, clean, pure, powerful, positive, productive relationships; coming to grips with your own humanness; and appreciating the Atonement in a different way.

As I have traveled the world, I have come to realize that we become the average of the five people we associate with the most, which means we must be willing to pay any price and travel any distance to associate with extraordinary human beings.

Isn't this why you chose to come to BYU? Isn't this why we attend our church meetings each week? Isn't this the formula for creating an extraordinary culture of excellence in academics and for how to build a championship sports program—in which the coaches recruit one extraordinary human being at a time who also happens to be a gifted athlete?

It is my experience that when you put a hard-to-catch horse in the same field with an easy-to-catch horse, you usually end up with two hard-to-catch horses. When you put a healthy child in the same room with a sick child, you usually end up with two sick children.

So what is the moral to the story? To be disciplined, healthy, and significant, you need to associate with the disciplined, healthy, and significant people who share your same values and follow your same personal and institutional honor code.

That is obvious. But do you know anyone who refuses to see this logic and who has given up what matters most for what they think they want at the moment?

The scriptures clearly warn:

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? [Mark 8:36–37]

Successful Versus Significant

I saw this reality unfold in two separate scenarios. The first one involved a football teammate of mine who was drafted into the National Football League with a huge second-round signing bonus and a big salary.

However, after only four years in the league, while at the top of his superstar career, he walked out of practice—quit—never to play again. Why? He loved being a football player but he hated playing football. He got what he wanted but he hated what he got. He loved the celebrity perks and fame and fortune that allowed him a successful life focused on a destination that's impressive. But because his inner voice and true purpose were misaligned with who he was and what he did, he would never be able to enjoy a life of significance that focused on a journey that's important. Can any of you relate? Will some of you graduate with a degree you want but, because in the real world there are no jobs in that field, never want what you get?

The second explanatory scenario unfolded with a beautiful, smart, and talented BYU coed who is an incredible singer-songwriter and who has written with many of the biggest names in country music.

Consequently, many of the lead-singing bad boys of bands are attracted to her, and she is attracted to them. As a conservative friend, I tried to counsel her that she has everything she needs to get what she wants, but at some point she should stop long enough to make sure she wants what she is getting.

My words continually fell on deaf ears until one day I had an epiphany. I told her she was acting like a dog chasing cars. If she, like a dog, caught the car, what would she do with it? Just let it drag her down a road she had not intended to go down and beat her up until she finally let go in divorce?

Are any of you chasing cars you really won't want? Are any of you becoming desensitized to what matters most, which is what lasts the longest, and are you slowly going inactive

because of the influences around you? Are any of you dating someone who can't take you to the temple because you are confused about the real definition of love?

The Bible says, "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16), which means that love is a commitment, not a way of feeling. Romance is not love. Romance comes from a Greek word that means "erotic," so I don't even want to talk about that. However, I do want you to think differently about love.

If I love you because you are beautiful, that is romance. But if you are beautiful because I love you, that is real love—it is a value-creating love that inspires you to be the best you can be.

Yet how many of us confuse love (commitment) with romance (emotion). What have we said our whole lives? "I love her so much; she makes me feel differently than I have ever felt before." Or, "I love him so much; he makes me feel differently than I have ever felt before." So do breakfast burritos! If you think you are in love, maybe you just need a long, cold shower and a box of Roloids!

"I love you" means nothing unless we back it up with action. True love is not finding someone who is perfect—it is finding someone who is perfect for you, so that when you are apart, you always say, "I like me best when I am with you; I want to see you again."

Coming to Grips

Creating the life of happiness you dream of and deserve also requires that you come to grips with your own humanness.

I know what you had to do to get into BYU. Congratulations for qualifying both spiritually and intellectually! Most of you were on your high school honor roll every time. That was not the case for me, and I am fortunate that my dad cut me some slack.

One time I came home with a report card that had four Fs and one D on it. What was my dad's response? "Son, it looks to me like you

are spending too much time on one subject.” You have got to love my dad!

The part of your extremely high achievement world here at BYU that is often forgotten is the frightening reality that when you do make a mistake, mess up, fail, or fall, it is usually harder on you than on most. BYU is a school of academic and sports champions—which means that around here, losing hurts worse than winning feels good.

The Doctrine and Covenants gives us comfort, stating, “Thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment” and “shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 121:7, 122:7).

But the question still remains: What are you going to do about it? Make excuses or claim “the devil made me do it”? No, he didn’t. The apostle Paul was clear when he said:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. [1 Corinthians 10:13]

Are you going to get mad, blame others, and stay mad? I think not. Staying angry and holding a grudge is like you drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. You need to forgive and get on with it.

And no, it wasn’t peer pressure that made you let your guard down. Pressure is not something that is naturally there; it is created when you question your own ability. And when you know what you can do, there is never any question.

So the question isn’t, Are you going to crash and burn every once in a while? Of course you are—you are human! In Romans 3:23 we read, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” The question is, What are you going to do about it?

Some will counsel you to exercise faith. But faith without works is not faith at all.

Some will encourage you to have hope. But the words of French philosopher Blaise Pascal caution, “We never live, but we hope to live; and, as we are always preparing to be happy, it is inevitable we should never be so” (*Pensées* [1670], section 2, “The Misery of Man Without God,” 172). These people are waiting for someone to ask them to the senior prom but have never taken the time to learn how to dance!

The most common counsel is to be patient. Patience is a virtue, yes, but not always. Any virtue taken to the extreme can become a vice. Patience allows us to never begin. Patience allows us to mindlessly wait our turn, believing that this is the hand we have been dealt, that this is the cross we must bear, and that there is nothing we can do about it—it is meant to be!

No, no, no! When life gets tough—and it surely will, because if you are not failing a few times, that means you are not pushing yourself hard enough—what you need is an unshakable commitment to persevere. Perseverance is patience with a purpose, when you willingly and proactively take your turn because you know why you should.

The Atonement

This is why creating the life of happiness you dream of and deserve also requires that you appreciate the Atonement in a different way.

We all know the first law of heaven is obedience. To test our obedience, God gave us the gift of moral agency. To protect our agency, we were given “an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11), compelling us to choose in every situation whether or not we will stand for what we believe. And because we are all human and are susceptible to the temptations of the world, God did not leave us on our own to face our challenges. Through Moroni He told us: “For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge” (Moroni 7:16).

We commonly call this inherent ability to discern right from wrong our conscience. This scripture means our conscience will never fail us; only our desire to follow it decreases as we continue to do the wrong thing.

Because Heavenly Father knew our agency would get us into trouble when we don't follow our conscience, John 3:16 beautifully states: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

I testify that Jesus is the Christ and that He died on the cross. He is my personal Savior. I know He lives and was resurrected, which guarantees our immortality. As Christians, we Latter-day Saints know that "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Because of the infinite Atonement, the Lord is not disappointed when you fall or transgress. The Lord is only disappointed when you don't learn the lesson and get back up and go again. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is continuous and real, which means that pain is a signal to grow, not to suffer. And once you learn the lesson the pain is teaching you, the pain goes away. In life there are no mistakes, only lessons.

So if you ever find yourself in a position in which you need to clear some things up and talk with an ecclesiastical leader about repenting and receiving forgiveness, remember that discipline is to teach, not to punish. You can't increase a person's performance by making that person feel worse. Humiliation immobilizes your behavior. This means that you can walk into your bishop's office with the comforting and motivating assurance of Elder Jeffrey R. Holland's words: "It takes exactly as long to repent as it takes you to say, 'I'll change'—and mean it" ("For Times of Trouble," BYU devotional address, 18 March 1980).

And while you are working with your loving bishop, will you make sure you are also working on loving yourself? Every therapist

will tell you that when you slip up and make a mistake at any level, the hardest thing for you to do is to forgive yourself. I promise it will always be okay in the end. And if it is not okay right now, then it is not the end!

Time

This brings me to the second transformational word of Alma's wisdom: *time*. Using your time wisely is about realizing that there are no ordinary moments and finding your personal "why."

I love what NFL Hall of Fame inductee Emmitt Smith said about his 24/7 understanding of time:

Winning isn't something that just happens to you on the field when the whistle blows or the crowd roars. Winning is something that is built physically and mentally every day that you train and every night that you dream. [Game On: Find Your Purpose—Pursue Your Dream (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 4, 13]

When you boil it down, there are really only two times in life: now and too late. Today you have never been this old before, and today you will never be this young again. So all you ever have is right now; every right now matters. This means you can't always control what happens—but you can always control what happens next.

Did you get all that? Do you believe it? Do you believe that you can leave the Marriott Center today different than you were when you arrived? Do you believe that no matter what your past has been, you have a spotless future? Do you really believe that one moment in time can change you forever? I do.

Fonzie

I was on a program with the famous actor Henry Winkler, who played Fonzie on the 1970s television sitcom *Happy Days*. The saddest thing is that most of you are so young you don't even know who I am talking about.

You need to Google him and see that he was the coolest dude who ever lived. He played the dad in the movie *Holes* and the football coach in *The Water Boy*.

After our speeches Winkler decided he wanted to take some time off and treat himself to a matinee movie, so he slid in through the side exit door of the theater. As he shuffled down the aisle to find a vacant seat and turned to sit down in the chair, the little girl sitting right behind him smiled a giant smile, pointed her finger, and slowly said, “Fonzie.”

Winkler immediately snapped into the Fonzie character. He wiggled his hips, flipped his hair, pointed his finger, and said, “Hey, whoa!”

The lady sitting next to the little girl passed out. The theater manager immediately came out and took care of the woman’s needs. Lying in the aisle with a cold pack on her forehead, she was asked why she had passed out. With tears in her eyes, she whispered, “My little girl is autistic, and that is the very first word she has ever spoken in her entire life!”

Yes, one moment in time can change you forever—either positively or negatively. The difference will be in how you react and what you learn from it. In other words, things happen for a reason, but it is our responsibility in every moment in time to determine what that reason is. The scriptures are clear that our individual use of time is significant to God:

Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. [Psalm 39:4]

[A man’s] days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;

Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day. [Job 14:5–6]

Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do,

for God shall be with you forever and ever. [D&C 122:9]

A popular saying explains it perfectly: “The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why” (see Taylor Hartman, *Color Your Future: Using the Color Code to Strengthen Your Character* [New York: Fireside, 2000], 147).

In my experience, when your “why” is bigger than your “why not,” you can always persevere to become significant. Let me illustrate with another life-altering event that actually links me to why I am here today.

Finding Your Personal “Why”

I played football for thirteen years and was a projected number-one draft pick into the National Football League until one day in practice that dream ended. Lyle and I lined up fifteen yards apart in a tackling drill, and on the coach’s whistle, we ran into each other full speed. In a violent head-on collision, our helmets crashed, my shoulder was smashed into my sharp fiberglass pad, and we slammed to the ground. When Lyle got off of me, my arm dangled at my side and a sharp, burning, piercing pain penetrated the entire right side of my body.

I had compressed my neck, severed the axillary nerve in my right deltoid, and suffered a grade-two concussion, which meant that as I lay in bed that night, I heavily perspired, profusely shook, threw up several times, and cried myself to sleep.

Most thought it was only a shoulder injury, but I was paralyzed physically and emotionally for fourteen months. I visited sixteen of the best doctors in North America, who all told me that I would not get any better.

Have you ever heard this? What if you believed it? You would never get any better.

Sure, it was a physical injury, but it affected my whole life. I couldn’t write anymore; I was right-handed. I couldn’t concentrate on school

or work because it felt like someone was biting my shoulder and burning my body 24/7. My arm would get crazy contractions that felt like somebody had plugged it into an electric socket. Once I went home to a family gathering, and as I was sitting at the dinner table, my arm suddenly twitched and knocked a bowl of mayonnaise off the table about twenty feet. At the next meal my younger brother showed up wearing a batting helmet and goggles!

Before long my life was in a downward spiral that hit rock bottom, and I didn't think I could get up and go again. Can any of you relate? Have any of you ever felt lonely in a loved one's arms or alone in a crowded room? I have. Have any of you ever had your heart broken by someone you loved or had your dreams shattered by a career-ending athletic injury or lost your starting position on your team or not gotten accepted to the grad school of your choice or blown off a semester so badly that you could lose your scholarship? I have.

And to make it worse, I had people come up to me and say, "I know what you are going through." No, they didn't!

Psychologists tell us that the average person talks between 100 and 200 words per minute, and yet we think between 200 and 400 words per minute, which means no one ever knows everything that we think or feel or all that we want to say. The author Henry David Thoreau was right when he wrote, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (*Walden* [1854], I, "Economy").

So again, the question remains: What are you going to do about it?

You can't quit—it is a league rule! Yet no one knows your pain and sorrow. So where do you go? To whom do you turn?

If you remember nothing else I say today, always remember that you are never all alone at any time or for any reason because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is always there and always understands everything you are going through and will help you help yourself through it. In my darkest moments I knew

"I [could] do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

God Didn't Heal Me

I received several priesthood blessings over the course of my ordeal, and, yes, the Lord blessed me with strength to carry on. However, although He could have completely and instantaneously healed me, He did not.

I felt like the brother of Jared when God told him to build a boat but didn't tell him how to light the journey. The brother of Jared had to find the solution on his own, which incidentally included him asking the Lord to touch the stones to illuminate the way.

In my case, what God did give me was an inspirational understanding of the giant difference between being depressed and being discouraged—the wisdom that there is a huge difference between being depressed and being disappointed—which meant getting better would also be a joint venture between me and heaven in which I would pray and plead to Almighty God as though everything depended on Him and work as though everything depended on me.

The bottom line: I stayed paralyzed for fourteen months because I was asking the wrong questions. I was blaming God, asking Him, "How could You let this happen to me?" And I was asking the doctors, "How can I get better?" When I should have been asking God, "Why did this happen and what am I supposed to learn from this?" and asking myself, "Why should I get better?"

You see, once we answer why, figuring out the "how to" is simple.

Part of my answer was realizing that football was just what I did, not who I was as a man. When you identify yourself in terms of what you do instead of who you are, you become a human doing instead of a human being—unacceptable if significance is what you seek.

Now that I have fully recovered, I must confess that my accident is clearly one of the best things that ever happened to me.

Because adversity introduces us to ourselves, I am the man I am and have the perspective I have because of this heartbreaking, dream-shattering ordeal. And through it all I learned that if you do today what others won't, you can accomplish tomorrow what others can't. It is guaranteed that with God's help you can always turn your setbacks into comebacks and your stumbling blocks into stepping-stones.

Prepare

This brings me to the third transformational word of Alma's wisdom: *prepare*. Preparing yourself to meet God is about serving the Lord on a mission and judging less and accepting more.

There is no better place or time for a young man and a young woman to prepare themselves to meet God than in the mission field. My personal testimony is that it is not a choice to go on a mission; it is a calling to serve the Lord through missionary work. When it comes to the Lord, our answer should always be yes—and then find out what He needs us to do afterward.

Brother and Sister Smith were an elderly couple in their late seventies who had been baptized for one year, had just gone to the temple to be sealed to their family, and had just received their patriarchal blessings. Right before I left on my mission, in a fast and testimony meeting, Brother Smith stood to bear his testimony. He asked for the attention of all the young men and women, pulled out his blessing, unfolded the paper, and read, "Brother Smith. You and your wife would have joined the Church many years earlier except the missionary who was supposed to teach you the gospel decided not to go on a mission."

To every young man and young woman within the sound of my voice, I challenge you to prepare yourself to accept the sacred call to serve the Lord on a full-time mission! Don't go to please your parents or because it is expected by Church leaders. Go because you demand it of

yourself, regardless of whether you get called to Brazil; England; Cut-n-Shoot, Texas; or Alligator, Mississippi, where the sign at the edge of town reads, "Population 196 and Larry's Coon Dog." Go because you realize that Heavenly Father usually answers prayers through other people, and it will be really cool when He uses you.

Those of us who are returned missionaries can all testify that we know we were called by inspiration to serve in our specific mission fields and that we were put with specific companions to proselyte in specific areas and to love and serve specific people who were searching for the truth but needed our specific personality to help them find it.

The sad thing about this witness is that many of us believe that when we were released as full-time missionaries, our mission was over and complete. This is not true. Whenever we leave our classmates, teammates, or coworkers; drop our date off after a night on the town; get off work; finish our athletic practice; or conclude a study session at the library, if we have talked about the right things and set the proper example, are we not in fact still "returning missionaries" when we get back to our apartments?

And in all humility and with great soberness, will you please remember that when the investigators you taught and the new members you helped convert come looking for "their missionary" who brought them true happiness and an eternal family, if they find you have gone inactive and have stopped keeping the covenants you made in the temple, this shocking disappointment could have a long-term, generational, negative impact on them. As a former prodigal son, I promise you are welcome and wanted and needed, knowing firsthand that our church meetings are not country clubs for saints—they are sanctuaries for sinners! Come back, my friend, and let us run to meet you!

For those of you who have not chosen to go on a full-time mission, have come home early

for personal reasons, have chosen to serve our country and protect our freedom in our amazing military, or are one of our wonderful friends of another faith, know that we love you and need you and honor you and that you are as equally significant to the Lord as everybody else. You still have been called to serve the Lord on a mission in other ways, which is the best way to prepare to meet God.

Preparing to meet God also requires that you judge less and accept more. They say there is no one more self-righteous than the newly converted or those who believe they have the exclusive truth. Does this apply to any of us here today?

Missionary Moment

When I was on my mission in Ireland, I was sent with my companion to open up a city called Tralee, which had no members. One day a woman answered her door and surprisingly called us “elders” and invited us in. I noticed she had not looked at our name tags, so I asked her what she knew about the Church. She smiled and proudly told us she was a member but had been inactive for years. I asked her if she still believed, and she told us that yes, she still had a testimony.

When I asked her why she had gone inactive, she explained that she had never been able to break her smoking habit and that every time she went to Church and the members smelled the smoke on her clothes and breath, she was made to feel guilty and unwanted. She then turned her head away for about sixty seconds. When she looked back at us, she had tears streaming down her cheeks. With her lip quivering, she sweetly and humbly replied, “I sure wish everybody’s sins smelled.”

Didn’t Jesus invite us all to come as we are? Didn’t Jesus say, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7)? Didn’t Jesus teach us to “leave the ninety and nine and go after [the one]” (Luke 15:4)?

“Just Don’t Look!”

As this message percolates within your soul, let me also tie its powerful ramifications into the unacceptable plague of pornography. If you are one who is fighting this battle, yes, you are welcome to come as you are to all of our church meetings, and yes, you should continually work with your bishop and professional therapist. But you have to stop judging yourself as weak and addicted beyond your self-control and start accepting the fact that when it comes to pornography, it is not enough to say, “I will do my best.” You must succeed in doing that which is necessary. Pornography is a deal breaker in every relationship!

As a bishop of young single adults, I came to realize that nothing smells worse than the stench of the effects of pornography. Even though some of you think pornography is something you can hide, your obvious lack of affection and calloused inability to be sensitive to the needs of others “smells” at home, at school, at work, on a date, and in church! My solemn message to those of you who are facing this challenge is encompassed in a short and pointed story.

I was flying cross-country with my family and playing cards with my ten year-old daughter, who was sitting next to me.

I said, “Alexandrea, you need to turn your cards and hold them up closer to your face so I can’t see them.”

She scowled and fired back, “Just don’t look!”

Any questions? If I am going too fast, just raise your hand. Didn’t President Uchtdorf tell us in a recent conference talk, “Stop it!” (“The Merciful Obtain Mercy,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 75)?

Yes, Jesus said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone,” and, yes, we can hate the sin and love the sinner. But let us not forget what Jesus emphatically told the woman as she departed: “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). That’s right—don’t look at pornography any more. Stop it now. End of discussion!

Perform

This brings me to the fourth and final transformational word of Alma’s wisdom: *perform*. Performing your labors is about raising your bar, understanding the true purpose of education, and supporting each other in our beliefs and righteous desires.

Broomstick

I am paid big bucks by teams in the National Football League to work with their players to take their performance to the next level. When I walk into a team meeting, there are around fifty-three elite athletes who collectively represent over \$105 million dollars in annual salary. Totally absurd! What would you say to them? The good news is that the same thing that motivates them is the same thing that motivates you and me: expectations.

At these meetings I ask an assistant coach and a captain of the team to come to the front of the room and hold a broomstick twelve inches off the floor. Before the meeting I get the name of the most naturally gifted athlete on the team—the guy who can jump thirty-eight inches high. And, for the record, every one of the thirty-two teams in the NFL has a player on their roster who can jump thirty-eight inches high!

I then ask this superstar to come forward and face the broomstick. I ask him if he thinks he can jump over the twelve-inch-high broomstick. He doesn’t move and glares at me like I am out of my mind. So I change the question: “Will you jump over this twelve-inch-high broomstick?”

Reluctantly he hops over the bar, and this is when the motivational teaching begins.

I ask him, “Why did you only jump twelve inches high when you and your teammates know you can jump thirty-eight inches high?”

And the answer is always the same: “Because that is all you asked me to do!”

How high is your bar? Everybody with whom you live, play, study, worship, and work knows how high your bar is because they see

it every day. But only you know how high it should be. Only you know if you are pushing yourself to your ultimate capacity and potential as a human being—physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially.

We are taught in the scriptures to “stand in holy places” (D&C 45:32; 101:22). My bishop, Steve Murdock, challenged our young people to “stand holy in places.” Whether we are on a date, competing in sports, taking a test, working on the job, or attending church, the Lord needs each of us to stand as a witness to the benefits of living the gospel of Jesus Christ and encourage one another to do the same.

Why We Really Go to College

Performing your labors also requires that you fully understand the true purpose of education. In 2007, according to *Motto*, a national magazine, the sign at the entrance of the BYU campus—“Enter to learn; go forth to serve”—ranked as one of the top ten best college mottos in the United States (see “BYU Not Alone in Using Motto ‘Enter to Learn,’” *Deseret News*, 4 August 2007). But what does this motto mean?

When fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith entered the Sacred Grove to pray, it was because he had read the Bible passage found in James 1:5, which reads, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” It doesn’t say, “If any of you lack knowledge or information”; it specifically states, “If any of you lack wisdom.” A dictionary definition of wisdom is “applied knowledge—the practical application of truth through experience.”

Yes, Joseph learned some important things that day during his conversation with the Father and the Son—especially about the true identity and real personality of the Godhead, which distinguishes our theology from other churches. This one fact alone gives me courage in dealing with other beliefs or disbeliefs, as in the case of an atheist who claims he doesn’t believe in God. My response to him is always, “What version of God is it that you

don't believe in? There are so many and so many churches to choose from. There is a good chance that I don't believe in the God you don't believe in either."

The other significant thing Joseph learned that day in the grove was that both the Father and the Son knew him by name. Heavenly Father, pointing to Jesus, said, "[Joseph,] this is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Joseph Smith—History 1:17). The Lord also knows your name and your innermost thoughts and desires and will always respond to your requests for Him to be a part of your life.

But perhaps more important than the new knowledge Joseph acquired was the challenge he received to walk out of the grove and do something with his newly acquired education. As college students you must remember that knowledge is power, but knowledge has no heart. All of the information in the world isn't going to make a person successful: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

My favorite scripture of all time is 1 Nephi 3:7:

I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.

We don't learn to know; we learn to do. Reason leads to conclusions, but it is emotion that leads to action. This truth is illuminated in one of the most profound lessons in all of scripture. At the Last Supper, Jesus told Peter:

Behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. [Luke 22:31–32]

Obviously Peter had a strong testimony that Jesus was the Christ. He had seen Him heal the sick, raise the dead, walk on water, and feed thousands with a few loaves of bread; he was with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. In Matthew 16 we read of when Peter bore his testimony:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? . . .

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. [Matthew 16:13, 16–17]

Yes, the apostle Peter had a strong testimony of the Savior. But Jesus knew Peter was still weak enough to deny Him three times. Consequently He spoke of a future understanding and a deeper conviction He called conversion.

Are you truly converted? Do you have an unshakable conviction so you will never deny Christ?

I have spoken at the Utah State Prison three times. It is an eerie place. Did you know that many returned missionaries are locked up there? Here are some questions to consider: Did they have testimonies before they broke the law? Could what happened to them happen to you? Do you believe the Church is true or do you absolutely know it is true? Do you merely have a testimony of the Book of Mormon or are you absolutely converted to follow its teachings and live its truth? It is never enough to just know the gospel—we must do the gospel! We read in James 2:19: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

Because you BYU students understand the significance of having a testimony *and* being converted, you know something that other

students are not aware of. The reason you go to college is to get the job of your dreams, not just the job that is left over. When you graduate, the goal is not to engage and do business with everyone who wants what you have. The goal is to engage and do business with those who believe what you believe.

In sports, the teams that win championships are not those that have players who want what you want—because everybody wants to win. Teams that win championships like you do at BYU have players who believe what you believe!

The Broken Doll

This brings me to my final point—that performing your labors is also about supporting each other in your beliefs and in every righteous desire. At the end of every day, who you are and what you have accomplished is determined by the support you have received and have given to others.

I conclude with a favorite vignette that drives this point home.

A mother encouraged her daughter to come home as soon as school was over. The time she was supposed to arrive came, and the time went. Thirty minutes later, her daughter walked in through the front door of their home, and the mother scolded her, saying, “Where have you been? I have been worried sick!”

The daughter said, “Oh, Mommy, I walked my friend Sally home. She dropped her doll on the sidewalk, and it broke all to pieces. It was awful!”

Her mother said, “So you are late because you stayed to help your friend pick up the pieces of the doll and put it back together again?”

She replied, “Oh, no, Mommy. I didn’t know how to fix the doll. I just stayed to help her cry.”

My prayer is that you will leave here today more committed than ever before to be there for each other, not just in sharing tears of sadness but in sharing tears of joy and victory as you support one another in your climb up the four steps on the stairway to heaven—that your *life* will be significant, that your *time* will be well spent, that you will *prepare* in every way, and that you will *perform* in every moment.

So when you do meet God, you will hear those most rewarding words that make it all worthwhile: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . : enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21) and be “received into heaven, that [you] may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41).

In case this is my final address to you, I want each of you to know—especially my friends of other faiths—that I know God is real and that this unconditionally loving Heavenly Father actually hears and answers our prayers. I know that Jesus is the Christ and my personal Savior. I know the Book of Mormon is true and testify that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is led today by a living prophet of Almighty God. And I testify that this Church has the priesthood power of God, as I have been miraculously healed on many occasions at the hands of my priesthood brethren.

Because of this testimony, my challenge is on the table. Because one moment in time can change everything, and because no matter what our past has been we have a spotless future, we can actually start to prepare to meet God in a more intensified way the second we leave the Marriott Center today. I challenge you and myself to do so, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.