

# *A World Full of Challenges and Opportunities*

L. TOM PERRY

President Samuelson, faculty, and you very extraordinary graduating class: how exciting the day is for each of you. How happy I am to be part of these graduation ceremonies. With fifteen of us rotating this assignment, it is a special thrill to take my turn in offering you my sincere congratulations. From this view I just marvel at the wonderful potential I see in this room and the magnificent opportunities that lie ahead of you.

I want to initially direct my remarks to you wonderful parents who are here celebrating this great event. That child you have watched over, trained, prayed over, encouraged, put up with on occasion, fed, and clothed is today graduating from the world-famous Brigham Young University. I am certain your heart is swelling with pride for what they have accomplished. I will just pause for a minute and let all of you give a big sigh of relief. Your child made it! Your child is graduating at long last.

On this happy occasion I am reluctant to tell you that your counseling, teaching, and helping this child is not over. Probably at no time in their life—other than early childhood—will they be more willing to seek your counsel

than now. They may be exiting this campus, but they are now entering the school of real life. They are beginning a new phase of their life when decisions are more difficult and will have such a bearing on their future.

Decisions they are facing may include the following: Do I continue my education and go after an advanced degree? Should I accept this job offer or another? Will I get any job offers? Where will I make my home? The list of questions and concerns goes on and on. These decisions come at a time in their life when the world's divisive message of what is truly important will clamor for their attention and make it difficult to know in which direction to go.

Parents, you must continue to give sound counsel to your children when it is requested—and sometimes even when it is not! You can choose to continue to be a spiritual compass in their lives, but you must be

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prepared for it and be willing to offer counsel at the appropriate time. Your counsel should be inspired and insightful—without judgment or equivocation—and be based on the values you hold dear as a follower of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Your children should leave this university knowing that the true source of direction and inspiration lies in looking and pleading heavenward.

Lest we fall into the pattern warned about in the scriptures:

*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.*

*But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.<sup>1</sup>*

Your children will continue to need your help and direction in finding balance in their lives—to find harmony between employment and family and church and civic responsibilities.

Now, for you who are graduating: Listen up! We have a lot invested in each one of you, and you and your parents have invested a lot in you to get you to this point. You have decisions and a whole life ahead of you. Today you graduate. Your undergraduate years are now over. You are now finished with this point of your life. You will not travel this road again. There will be no retakes, second chances, or repeats. You have your degree. It has been a lot of hard work. Today you have a great deal of satisfaction for what you have accomplished. You will always have special memories of these wonderful days. With this degree has come accumulated experience and hard-earned wisdom.

Tomorrow the journey in life resumes for you. The choices you make will make all the difference in what you want to achieve. With all of these new decisions and challenges

before you, let me encourage you to seek and find a balance in your future life.

President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke about finding this proper balance:

*I want to plead with you to keep balance in your lives. Do not become obsessed with what may be called “a gospel hobby.” A good meal always includes more than one course. You ought to have great strength in your chosen . . . field of expertise. But I warn you against making that your only interest. . . .*

*. . . Beware of obsession. Beware of narrowness. Let your interests range over many good fields while working with growing strength in the field of your own profession.<sup>2</sup>*

My parents traditionally introduced something to each of their children on their first birthday. Even though I cannot remember this event in my own life, I watched it repeated in the lives of my two brothers and was struck by the insight I have gained through this little exercise. We have often referred to it in our family gatherings. It was just a simple demonstration that the whole family participated in. This demonstration consisted of the following:

On the child’s first birthday, my parents would sit their child in one corner of the living room. Then they would set out four items for the toddler to choose from: a baby bottle, a bank, a toy, and a Bible. We would all sit back and watch as the toddler made his choice from those four items.

Each item represented different values each of us might have—our four basic needs in mortality. Family tradition held that whichever item the baby chose, it would become their focus in life.

Now let me report on how valued this tradition has turned out to be. In our family there were three older sisters. Then came, in order, Tom, Ted, and Bob. What were our results? Tom clutched the bank and selected accounting and finance for his chosen profession. Ted

grabbed the Bible and is almost always seen with a book in his hand. He became a lawyer.

Bob was different. Bob crawled over to the four items, sat himself down on the Bible, then picked up the baby bottle in one hand and held the toy in the other and placed the bank between his knees. He was the balanced member of the family. He used his skills in negotiating parts contracts for Boeing.

These four objects are representative of the different values that each of you graduates might have in your lives—your priorities and how you might understand how to find balance throughout mortality.

### The Bottle

First, the bottle. The bottle represented good physical health and emotional strength.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin said: “Good physical and spiritual health can help us to stay on the straight and narrow way.”<sup>3</sup>

President Ezra Taft Benson said:

*The condition of the physical body can affect the spirit. That’s why the Lord gave us the Word of Wisdom. He also said that we should retire to our beds early and arise early (see D&C 88:124), that we should not run faster than we have strength (see D&C 10:4), and that we should use moderation in all good things. . . . A good physical examination periodically is a safeguard and may spot problems that can be remedied. Rest and physical exercise are essential, and a walk in the fresh air can refresh the spirit. Wholesome recreation is part of our religion, and a change of pace is necessary, and even its anticipation can lift the spirit.*<sup>4</sup>

Learn the value of maintaining good physical and emotional health throughout your life. You will not only live longer but will also live happier and more fulfilling lives.

I have been blessed throughout my life to have good health. It has allowed me to serve in many capacities. I never dreamed that I would live to be the age that I am, but how grateful I

am to be alive and able to do all that the Lord would still have me do. If you are going to continue to progress spiritually throughout your life, then you must be certain to take care of your physical and emotional needs. Eat right, exercise, pray daily, and keep your covenants and you will be blessed with a productive life. Graduates, remember the health of this special body you have been blessed with.

### The Toy

Now, the toy. The toy my parents set out represented the need to take time out and to recognize personal worth and add to it. Do things in your spare time that will add to your personal value. Nothing bothers me more in life than seeing wasted time! Schedule your time wisely and make sure there is always time for family, work, relaxation, and reflection.

Before his call as president of the Church, Elder Thomas S. Monson said:

*Our house is to be a **house of order**. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). . . . Such is true in our lives. Let us provide time for family, time for work, time for study, time for service, time for recreation, time for self—but above all, time for Christ.*<sup>5</sup>

President Gordon B. Hinckley counseled us that everyone has an obligation to himself. He needs to get rest and exercise. He needs a little recreation. He must have time to study. Everyone needs time to read the scriptures. He needs time to ponder and meditate and think by himself. Whenever possible, he needs to discuss these things with his sweet companion so that they will enjoy this time together. Learn to plan valuable time for yourself.

### The Bank

Next is the bank. The bank represented the importance of financial security.

Financially, we live in a dangerously precarious time—not just in the United States

but throughout the entire world. Financial independence is often talked about but rarely practiced by national governments. Sadly, more and more households are following the pattern of political leaders and are living on borrowed funds to meet their daily needs and wants.

One of the most important lessons you will ever learn is the security and peace that come from living within your means! If your family makes one dollar each week and then spends only ninety-nine cents, then you are living appropriately. If you are spending more than you take in, heartache and sorrow are sure to follow unless and until you learn how to live more providentially.

Understand that you will not have all of the things in your home when you first start out. My heart aches when I see a young newlywed couple in a larger-than-they-can-afford home with the latest furnishings that borrowed money can buy.

I agree with Walter Winchell, who said, "People spend money they haven't earned to buy things they don't need to impress people they don't like."<sup>6</sup>

You will not have, and you do not need, the new car, the new couch, or the house with the latest and fanciest features money—borrowed money—can buy. Learn to accept a modest living and be okay with that.

Of course there are some purchases that are appropriate to make with borrowed funds, but too many of our young people today are borrowing money for things they "want" versus things they "need."

Elder Sterling W. Sill noted:

*We cannot separate our success from our statistics. That is, a banker may not be very favorably impressed if we say, "Our financial statistics are terrible but we are wonderful." The banker might want to know about such prosaic things as our assets and liabilities, our income and our outgo, our bank balances and our overdrafts. Planning and*

*record keeping are so closely related in our success that they cannot be discussed separately.*<sup>7</sup>

I had a job interview with the officer who had the power to give me employment. He asked me to give him a definition of interest. I gave him the best book definition I could come up with. He said, "No! This is the one I want you to remember: 'Thems that understands it, earns it. Thems that don't, pays it.'" Learn how to live within your income.

### **The Scriptures**

That Bible my parents laid out for their toddlers represented the need for individual spiritual strength.

We teach spiritual strength to our children by offering father's blessings, kneeling in daily family prayer, regularly attending the temple, regularly participating in Church meetings, and participating in daily scripture study.

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi explains the purpose of the scriptures when he says:

*And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.*<sup>8</sup>

A Christ-centered home will always be a safe haven for our children. The home and the family is the fundamental unit of time and all eternity. We need to teach faith in the Savior in all that we do. That is the message for our children. That is the message that we have for the entire world!

The scriptures teach us how to become closer to God and His Son, Jesus Christ. They teach us how to live and how to repent when we make mistakes. They remind us of the value each of us has as a son or daughter of God. We are His children. He loves us. He wants us to return to live with Him again. He sent His Son to die for us. Who are we to

question our value or worth in His sight? We must always move forward and never look back. Daily prayer and scripture study should be a part of every Latter-day Saint home. Ensure that as you leave this university and establish yourself, wherever you may live, the gospel will always be part of your home.

Finally, make the gospel of Jesus Christ a vital and active part of your life.

### Conclusion

So to you parents again, I remind you that teaching your children does not end with graduation. The teaching of your children is merely entering a new phase—a new phase for them as they take those additional steps toward independence and a new phase for you as you try to communicate more effectively with them.

To both parents and graduates, I encourage you to stay on top of technology so that you can keep up with one another and understand one another throughout your lives. No one should go into technological retirement when the last child leaves the nest. Instead, that is when you should be alert and more mentally active—learning new things and preparing yourself for future opportunities to have input in the lives of your posterity.

I have in my briefcase an iPhone and an iPad. I try to spend time each day learning new ways to use these devices. They are modern miracles! They allow me to access information from nearly everywhere around the world. I can communicate with my son or granddaughter

by phone, text, email, FaceTime, Twitter, instant messaging, and a hundred other ways that only a few years ago we had never heard of!

### Testimony

I am grateful for the example of my parents and for the foresight they had to instill in their children an understanding of the basic needs we all have and the importance of keeping all things in proper balance within an eternal perspective.

My prayer is that each of you will leave here today better prepared to meet the world and its challenges. There are endless opportunities for good all around us! May each of you be blessed to find the proper balance in your life spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically is my prayer, in the name of our Lord and Savior, even Jesus Christ, amen.

### Notes

1. 2 Nephi 9:28–29.
2. *TGBH*, 31–33.
3. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Straight and Narrow Way,” *Ensign*, November 1990, 65.
4. Ezra Taft Benson, “Do Not Despair,” *Ensign*, November 1974, 66.
5. Thomas S. Monson, “Building Your Eternal Home,” *Ensign*, May 1984, 18; emphasis in original.
6. Walter Winchell, Patter, *Reader’s Digest*, September 1935, 100.
7. Sterling W. Sill, *Principles, Promises, and Powers* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 215.
8. 2 Nephi 25:26.