

# “This Is My Day of Opportunity”

MICHELLE D. CRAIG

Thank you all for coming. I feel the weight of saying something that will help you this morning. I want to share a message from my heart. I want to tell you some things that have helped me. Let me start with a story.

Although I grew up in Provo, right before my junior year of high school, my family moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. President Spencer W. Kimball, the prophet at the time, called my father to serve as a mission president, so my family packed up and off we went.

When I moved back to Provo for my freshman year of college, I came alone and saw the BYU campus through the eyes of a new freshman, away from home and family. I didn't know a soul when I moved into the dorms.

I had been lonely in high school, but I determined that I would use this opportunity as a fresh start. My brother challenged me to learn the names of three new people each day and then call them by name whenever I saw them. I volunteered for service opportunities that took me outside my comfort zone. Of course, even talking to some people was outside my comfort zone! I learned that focusing on others made me happier. It was here at BYU that I found joy in keeping my covenants as I got myself out of bed on Sunday mornings and attended church. And I learned the value of time.

I know that you are entering finals. Your time is precious, and you may be feeling anxious about that. I honestly still have a recurring nightmare that I am back in school during finals week but that I didn't attend class all semester. In fact, in my dreams I can't even remember where my classroom is when I try to attend one last class period before the final! We can all relate to the feelings of fear and panic when we realize that there may just not be enough time to finish what we have committed to do.

Speaking of panic, I remember walking into the Testing Center. There were times I walked in with dread—knowing that I was not prepared but that it was too late to do anything about it. Other times I remember feeling a quiet confidence; I had paid the price and felt comfortable in my mastery of the material I would be tested on.

This life is like a testing center. Occasionally we are given true-false tests in life—clear right and wrong choices, moments of truth. At those moments, stand up. Stand tall. Choose with courage. But more often, everyday life hands us multiple-choice tests—and sometimes they feel

---

*Michelle D. Craig, first counselor in the Young Women general presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on December 11, 2018.*

like the ones we take in which we are convinced our professor is trying to trick us. Is it A? B? C? A and C? All of the above? Or none of the above? All the choices may be good but wrong for this moment. Do we study or go to the temple? Major in French or philosophy? Multiple-choice tests of life—including our decisions about the use of our time—require wisdom and deeper understanding. That is why they are given to us by our school-teachers and by the Great Teacher and Refiner of our souls.

Amulek reminded us that *“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.”*<sup>1</sup>

Using our time wisely is not just a matter of having more self-discipline or willpower or utilizing the latest planner or time management app to help us organize and prioritize. We make real change when we understand the gift of time, the gift of a new day.

Years ago I heard a talk by President Thomas S. Monson that changed the way I thought about my time. He spoke about making the most of our opportunities and warned us to

*turn from the tempting allurements and eventual snare so cunningly and carefully offered us by “old man procrastination.” Two centuries ago, Edward Young said that “procrastination is the thief of time.” Actually, procrastination is much more. It is the thief of our self-respect. It nags at us and spoils our fun. It deprives us of the fullest realization of our ambitions and hopes. Knowing this, we jar ourselves back to reality with the sure knowledge that “this is my day of opportunity. I will not waste it.”*<sup>2</sup>

That last line remained in my mind and in my heart. I typed up that phrase—*“This is my day of opportunity. I will not waste it”*—and put it on my refrigerator as a constant reminder that each day is a gift and that what I choose to do with the time and the talents I have been given is my gift to God each day. Each time I went to the fridge, I remembered my commitment not to waste my opportunity.

I look out and see outstanding young men and young women who have worked hard and are here at a university that aims not only to provide a world-class education but also *“to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life.”*<sup>3</sup> This truly is *your* “day of opportunity.”

In the 1890s, an Italian economist named Vilfredo Pareto observed that 80 percent of the wealth in his country was controlled by just 20 percent of the population. This realization led to a theory that plays out in many areas of life. It is known as the 80/20 rule or the law of the vital few. Eighty percent of our success comes from only 20 percent of our activities.

For example, Microsoft found that by fixing the top 20 percent of the most-reported bugs, 80 percent of the errors and crashes in a given system would be removed. In business, there is a saying that 20 percent of clients bring in 80 percent of revenue. Some say the same holds in sports and that 15 percent of the players produce 85 percent of the total wins, while the other 85 percent of the players create 15 percent of the wins.

This principle, although interesting when applied to computers, clients, and sports, is crucial to understand in life. Most of our progress comes from only a few key things. I have said before that *“being more does not necessarily equate to doing more.”*<sup>4</sup> It is easy to get caught in a busyness trap and spend our time on activities that contribute little to our overall goals while procrastinating the top 10 or 20 percent of things that are most valuable and important.

In the most recent general conference, President Russell M. Nelson said, *“I plead with you to take a prayerful look at how you spend your time.”*<sup>5</sup> If we want to avoid wasting our day of opportunity, the answer isn’t just to go faster. We want to go in the right direction, to focus on the vital few things that determine our success. So what should we focus on?

Years ago I heard Elder Jeffrey R. Holland speak at the funeral of an outstanding young man in my ward named Ben. In speaking of Ben, Elder Holland reminded us of what matters most in each new day of opportunity. Elder Holland

taught me that we can learn about life's vital few things when faced with the passing of someone we love:

*One of the benefits of attending a funeral is that we get a tremendous reminder that this world is not our home, and no one in this room ought to think that it is. Nobody came here to stay, and nobody is going to do so. We sometimes live and think and act like this is home, like everything we can accrue and everything we can accomplish—in a material or temporal or even civic way—is the be-all and end-all of life.*

*Our mortal deeds and accomplishments are important. They are valuable. The best of them are gifts of God. We have a wonderful world. It is meant to be wonderful, but it is a wonderful way station, not a final destination. I will cherish the lessons that Ben has left with me about how you get ready to move on, what you spend your time doing, where you put your focus, and how much you need to remember that this is the celestial kingdom, not celestial. Ben taught that we ought to use the former to prepare for the latter.*

*When it comes down to it, there aren't very many things you can take out of this world. A funeral is quick to remind us of that. . . . As near as I can tell, you can take three things:*

*You can take your **character**, including what you have learned, what you have done—who you have become. To build character is one of the purposes for which we are here.*

*You can take the **ordinances** of the gospel.*

*Because of the ordinances, the third thing that we pray we can take—and plan to take and want to take—is our **family**.*

Character, ordinances, and family relationships—these three things became my “vital few”—the things I would give my very best time and energy to. And I posted these words in a prominent place on my refrigerator to serve as a constant reminder.

So, learning from Elder Holland's advice on life and death, I want to talk with you about focusing on our character, on ordinances and covenants, and on our family relationships. These three things should prioritize our never-ending to-do

list and motivate us to reduce distractions that keep us from things that really matter so that we don't waste our opportunity here on earth.

But first let me say that I hope you will take notice of any impressions that will surely come to you if you are listening with the Spirit as we talk about these things. In fact, I will tell you a quick story before we go on. When my nephew McKay was just a little boy, he had been playing with toys and had made a big mess. My brother asked McKay to clean up, but each time he went to check on McKay, he found him doing a lot of playing—but no cleaning. Dad was beginning to get exasperated, and McKay could tell.

Finally, my brother asked McKay to stop and ask himself the question What should I do?

McKay thought for a minute and said, “Dad, listen. It is the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost is saying, ‘McKay, do nothing.’”

I have a testimony that when it comes to asking with real intent what we need to do to improve our discipleship and to use our time and talents in a way that our Father in Heaven wants, the Holy Ghost will always tell us to do *something!* So listen and resolve to do something.

### **Character**

First, character. God gives us experiences from which He intends us to forge a more divine character and invites us to join in His work of gathering Israel and helping others enjoy eternal life. That is a big goal, but help comes disguised in small packages.

I remember getting ready for bed one Sunday night years ago. I was exhausted and discouraged. The kids were all very young. My husband, Boyd, was busy with work and was serving as a bishop here on campus. He was gone most of the week and each Sunday from early in the morning until it was time for dinner—if we were lucky. I took the children to church each week in the Harris Fine Arts Center. Sacramento meetings were so quiet! I spent the entire time trying to keep the children busy and occupied so that they didn't disrupt the spirit of the entire meeting. Needless to say, I didn't get much out of the talks. We then

hurried home so that we could go to our home ward for Primary.

I tried to make Sunday a special day—one in which my children felt the Spirit and we learned the gospel together—the kind of Sabbath I had heard women I greatly admired speak about. But I felt that I spent most of my Sabbath breaking up fights, cleaning up messes, working in the kitchen, entertaining children, and watching the clock for when Boyd would finally make it home. Sunday was anything but a day of rest and spiritual renewal.

I was so happy that Boyd was having the opportunities that were coming to him, and I knew our family was being blessed, but I couldn't help feeling that while he was growing spiritually, I was backsliding—and doing so quickly. I felt I was just barely going through the motions and not getting any results.

As I fell into bed, I remembered that I had not read my scriptures, and, frankly, I didn't feel like doing so. I was tired and feeling a little sorry for myself. But I felt guilty, so I sat up and opened up my scriptures and told myself that reading just one verse would be fine and would fill the requirement of reading my scriptures that day. The Lord blessed me that night. I opened my scriptures to a verse that has become one of my very favorites—Doctrine and Covenants 64:33:

*Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great.*

I will never forget the peace and light I felt as I read that verse. The Spirit filled me, and my heart was softened. The Spirit whispered to me that the “great work” the Lord spoke about could be my life; it could be my family—if I continued doing the small things. And, in the end, it would make a big difference—even if I did feel weary at times.

The small children in my charge—and my small decisions—were my great work. At that time they were my chance at developing and helping others develop a more divine character.

You will have different challenges. You may or may not have children who challenge you. You may or may not have a career, a calling, or a craft. You may be challenged by a spouse or by *not* having a spouse. The paths in front of you are as varied as the paths that brought you to BYU.

But one thing I can promise you: God will be with you in the great work that lies ahead of you, whatever it is. Any worthwhile goal will require a lot of work and weariness and well-doing. You will need to push ahead when staying back and resting would be easier.

And, unless I miss my guess, the doors of your success will turn on small hinges: habits of prayer and patience, turning to the scriptures, and listening to the still, small voice. If you listen to that small voice, truly great things will proceed in your own life. The influence of the Holy Ghost will change your character,<sup>6</sup> and you will find that, whatever your path, you will not have wasted your day of opportunity.

### Ordinances

Elder Holland taught that the second vital thing we take from life is our covenants. I believe that the ordinances and covenants of the gospel are gifts from our loving Father. I believe that they are weapons against Satan and that they bring spiritual power. Covenants can make an enormous difference in our life.

This is one reason that President Russell M. Nelson is urging us to make the temple a priority. After the announcement of several temples in April, he said that

*construction of these temples may not change your life, but your time in the temple surely will. In that spirit, I bless you to identify those things you can set aside so you can spend more time in the temple.*<sup>7</sup>

Spending time receiving sacred ordinances and making and renewing covenants will bless every area of our lives. We can have faith in the Lord's arithmetic—that He will multiply and magnify our efforts when we make ordinances and covenants a priority.

There is much in your life you cannot control right now. You cannot always control if those you like don't seem to like you back, if you don't get the job or internship you wanted so badly, if your family situation is less than ideal, or if you struggle with physical or mental health challenges.

But there is something you can absolutely control: you can control if you will participate in gospel ordinances and how you will keep your covenants. And you will find that these ordinances will manifest "the power of godliness"<sup>8</sup> unto you.

### Family Relationships

Finally, Elder Holland taught, we take our family relationships into the next life. These are truly among the very vital few things we must focus on and pay attention to.

One morning as I was reading Alma 32, I had some unexpected insights. Perhaps because of some strain I was feeling in my family, verses that I usually read with faith in mind applied to family relationships. So when Alma wrote "tree," I thought "relationships":

*And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit.*

*But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root. . . .*

*Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because . . . ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof.<sup>9</sup>*

So how do we nourish relationships? The same way we nourish faith and character—with great diligence and patience! If we have nourished family relationships, when hard things happen—and they will—we will withstand the hard times and can continue enjoying the fruits that loving family relationships produce.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf said the following: "In family relationships *love* is really spelled *t-i-m-e*, time."<sup>10</sup>

I tried to teach that principle in the talk I gave at the last October conference. Recently I received an email from Hailey, a member of the Church in Salem, Oregon, and mother of six, who learned this lesson on her own. Here is what she said:

*After coming home last night from a couple of long days of helping at our elementary school, a flat tire, doctor's visit, radiology appointment, and emergency room visit for one of my sick children, I was greeted with a kitchen full of dishes and life mess all over my house. I was exhausted, . . . and honestly, I just wanted to shower and climb into bed. . . .*

*While I was trying to tidy the kitchen, my seven-year-old approached me and asked if I would walk down to our basement to help him find a particular toy. My first thought . . . was, "I just want to get the kitchen cleaned and kids to bed without interruption." He again asked if I would help him. . . .*

*I then remembered the following from your talk in conference: "When prompted, we can leave dishes in the sink or an in-box full of challenges demanding attention in order to read to a child, visit with a friend, babysit a neighbor's children, or serve in the temple [my insert: or help your child find a toy]. . . . [We can] see people not as interruptions but as the purpose of [our] life."*

*I looked at my son, who was looking up at me, and I looked at my sink full of dishes and countertops littered with clutter, and I said out loud, "Dishes, you have to wait."*

*As he and I proceeded to walk down our stairs to the basement, my son, Andrew, said, "Mom, you love me more than dishes, huh?"*

*To which I responded an unequivocal "Yes!" . . .*

*Then, this morning, while helping him finish his homework for school, I said, "Andrew, I love you."*

*He responded with, "Yup, you love me more than dishes."*

*That became our new parenting mantra: "I love you more than dishes" (or insert any of the other thousand to-dos on our list).<sup>11</sup>*

Hailey is my example in this. She knows that each day is a gift from a loving Father in Heaven.

You may not face this same situation. Your challenges may not be sinks and toys. But even today,

this week, you will have the chance to lift and support and heal others. You can forge relationships that heal and encourage and redeem.

Whatever your challenges, look up and see others around you. Don't see only the dirty dishes, problem sets to finish, chapters to read, or finals to take. Notice those around who need help.

You can show that you love your sibling more than you love watching your favorite show. You can show that you care more about roommates' feelings than you care about being right. You can show that your concern for others in your ward is real and your affection isn't fake. And then you will have relationships that show you have not wasted your time on earth but that you are joining in God's great work of lifting His children.

### Conclusion

This earth life is so short in the eternal scheme, but it determines so much. It is our "day of opportunity." Use it well and you will have opportunities you never dreamed of.

It is my prayer that each of us can be intentional in the way we use our time and energy. Making sure that time is spent on the "vital few" activities rather than the "trivial many" will bring happiness and peace not only in this life but in the life to come.

Let us use this season of renewal to recommit to avoiding distractions and keeping our focus on developing our character and increasing faith in Jesus Christ, on ordinances and covenants, and on nourishing loving relationships and helping those around us.

This is Christ's Church, and those of us who have been baptized have taken His name upon us. That we may act like it not only this Christmas season, His season, but always is my prayer. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### Notes

1. Alma 34:32; emphasis added.
2. Thomas S. Monson, "First Presidency Message: The Lighthouse of the Lord: A Message to the Youth of the Church," *Ensign*, February 2001; quoting Edward Young, *Night Thoughts* (1742–45), Night I, line 393; also quoting and paraphrasing Alfred Armand Montapert, *The Way to Happiness: The Eternal Quest of Mankind* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 60: "I must do something *good* with this day, and not waste it. This is my day of opportunity"; emphasis in original.
3. The Mission of Brigham Young University (4 November 1981).
4. Michelle D. Craig, "Divine Discontent," *Ensign*, November 2018; emphasis in original.
5. Russell M. Nelson, "Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints," *Ensign*, November 2018.
6. See Henry B. Eyring, "Gifts of the Spirit for Hard Times," *Ensign*, June 2007.
7. Russell M. Nelson, "Let Us All Press On," *Ensign*, May 2018.
8. D&C 84:20.
9. Alma 32:37–39.
10. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Of Things That Matter Most," *Ensign*, November 2010.
11. Letter to Michelle D. Craig; quoting Craig, "Divine Discontent."