

Child of Promise

HENRY B. EYRING

I am grateful for the music, the prayer, and the opportunity to be here with you tonight. Before this meeting I had the chance, along with my family, to visit with your stake presidencies, their wives, and a number of your leaders. I was struck with how much they care about you and the high hopes they have that I might be able to help you tonight. I can't do that, of course, unless I am given utterance by the power of the Holy Ghost. I hope you will add your faith to mine that I may be given that blessing.

You need to know I am deeply grateful that you are here and that you are giving me your attention. I know how rare attention is. You may have had the experience I have had of noticing that not very many people during a conversation listen carefully to the other person. Generally they are focusing on what they said last or what they will say next. Just think how remarkable it is, then, that you are sitting here, listening to me, with no hope that you can say anything, at least for the next thirty-five or forty minutes.

That offer of trust is all the more remarkable to me because I know something of the hurry and pressure you've felt today. Even though it is early in the term, you probably made a list, either on a scrap of paper or in your mind, with the title "Things to Do Today." Even with only a week into

the term, you probably had more things on that list than you could hope to complete. You may have even subdivided the list, the way I do sometimes, into categories like "Things Nice to Do," and "Things I Must Do," or even "Emergency: Must Be Done Today." Somehow your being here made it through the list, and I am grateful.

Since I know something of the anxiety the pressure of time creates in your life, I would like to share with you what little I have learned in my life about how to handle that feeling of hurry. It could help you in your life.

A Problem of the Heart

It's important to be sure we agree on the nature of the problem. Time passes at a fixed rate and we can't store it. You can just decide what to do with it or not to do with it. Now, if you will look honestly at your own performance over the last few days, you will notice a paradox. At the very time you were making those lists, feeling hurried, wondering how you could get everything done, you were

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wasting time. That happens because your self-disgust at wasting time and the increasing fear of deadlines spur your list making. It may even inspire you to go out and buy another daily planner, thinking maybe that's the cure. But suppose your new and better planner listed some of the things you spend your time with, as if you wrote down what your actions were instead of your intentions. It might read like this: "Talk about cars with the guy I meet at the laundromat," or "Sleep through my alarm and miss my first class," or "Stay at a friend's house even though he turns on a degrading television show."

Even a moment's reflection will help you see that the problem of using your time well is not a problem of the mind but of the heart. It will only yield to a change in the very way we feel about time. The value of time must change for us. And then the way we think about it will change, naturally and wisely.

That change in feeling and in thinking is combined in the words of a prophet of God in this dispensation. It was Brigham Young, and the year was 1877, and he was speaking at April general conference. He wasn't talking about time or schedules or frustrations with too many demands upon us. Rather, he was trying to teach the members of the Church how to unite themselves in what was called the united order. The Saints were grappling with the question of how property should be distributed if they were to live the celestial law. In his usual direct style, he taught the people that they were having trouble finding solutions because they misunderstood the problem. Particularly, he told them they didn't understand either property or the distribution of wealth. Here is what he said:

With regard to our property, as I have told you many times, the property which we inherit from our Heavenly Father is our time, and the power to choose in the disposition of the same. This is the real capital that is bequeathed unto us by our Heavenly Father; all the rest is what he may be pleased to add unto us. To direct, to counsel and to advise in the disposition of our time, pertains to our calling as God's servants, according to the wisdom which he has given and will continue to give unto us as we seek it. [JD 18:354]

Time is the property we inherit from God, along with the power to choose what we will do with it. President Young calls the gift of life, which is time and the power to dispose of it, so great an inheritance that we should feel it is our capital. The early Yankee families in America taught their children and grandchildren some rules about an inheritance. They were always to invest the capital they inherited and live only on part of the earnings. One rule was "Never spend your capital." And those families had confidence the rule would be followed because of an attitude of responsibility toward those who would follow in later generations. It didn't always work, but the hope was that inherited wealth would be felt a trust so important that no descendent would put pleasure ahead of obligation to those who would follow. Now, I can see and hear Brigham Young, who was as flinty a New Englander as the Adams or the Cabots ever hoped to be, as if he were leaning over this pulpit tonight. He would say something like this, with a directness and power I wish I could approach: "Your inheritance is time. It is capital far more precious than any lands or stocks or houses you will ever get. Spend it foolishly, and you will bankrupt yourself and cheapen the inheritance of those that follow you. Invest it wisely, and you will bless generations to come."

There is more than one way to spend time foolishly, as you know. You may sleep it away or play it away. But the real bankruptcy, the bankruptcy that will cheat all those who come after you, comes after the idleness and the thoughtless seeking for thrills. When you choose to see or hear filth portrayed, for instance, you may at first feel you have just spent some time. But if you persist, you will find that beyond time wasted you have allowed Satan to draw you toward sin and then into it. And then you will have incurred debts far beyond the time spent, debts that will burden and diminish every minute of existence that follows, unless and until you find the healing balm of the atonement of Jesus Christ through repentance, which takes pain, and time—sometimes a great deal of time and sometimes a great deal of pain.

Your Royal Inheritance

Oh, what Brigham Young would want for you, and what I pray you may have, is a heart that wants to invest your inheritance—time. There is a spiritual reality that, if you can see and know it is real, will not only lift your heart to invest your time wisely, but will lead you to do it well.

It's worth doing, not only because you have life ahead, but because you have eternity ahead as well. You might say, "Wait a minute, now. Surely the problem of investing time is just a problem for this life. Surely one reward for investing my time well here will be to be freed of that concern there." Well, here is one report suggesting your reward for investing your inheritance well here will be to get to do it forever. President Wilford Woodruff gave this report in general conference in 1896.

Joseph Smith continued visiting myself and others up to a certain time, and then it stopped. The last time I saw him was in heaven. In the night vision I saw him at the door of the temple in heaven. He came to me and spoke to me. He said he could not stop to talk with me because he was in a hurry. The next man I met was Father Smith; he could not talk with me because he was in a hurry. I met half a dozen brethren who had held high positions on earth, and none of them could stop to talk with me because they were in a hurry. I was much astonished. By and by I saw the Prophet again and I got the privilege of asking him a question.

"Now," said I, "I want to know why you are in a hurry? I have been in a hurry all my life; but I expected my hurry would be over when I got into the kingdom of heaven, if I ever did."

Joseph said: "I will tell you, Brother Woodruff. Every dispensation that has had the priesthood on the earth and has gone into the celestial kingdom has had a certain amount of work to do to prepare to go to the earth with the Savior when he goes to reign on the earth. Each dispensation has had ample time to do this work. We have not. We are the last dispensation, and so much work has to be done, and we need to be in a hurry in order to accomplish it."

Of course, that was satisfactory, but it was new doctrine to me. [Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, sel. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946), pp. 288-89]

Where did that feeling of hurry come from? It came from a confidence built from investing time as if it were precious to us, to God, and to God's children. If you will listen carefully, you will feel that as you remember the words of a living prophet.

President Ezra Taft Benson described who you are in the priesthood session of conference less than a month ago. For a moment he addressed himself to the Aaronic Priesthood boys, but he was talking to all of you, and to me. Did you listen and feel it, or did you pay little attention because he used almost the same words prophets have used since the Prophet Joseph? That's a hazard, by the way. Because prophets speak for God, and because God is consistent, they say the same things, over and over.

If you look for novelty, you will gain one of the great benefits of following a living prophet. For instance, prophets before Noah hadn't built arks, and it was important to heed the new message to get in it. But the people who didn't get in it were drowned because they laughed at the old message every prophet had repeated over and over since the days of Adam. It was simple and it was familiar. Here it is:

Hearken, and give heed unto my words;

Believe and repent of your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, even as our fathers, and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost, that ye may have all things made manifest; and if ye do not this, the floods will come in upon you. [Moses 8:23-24]

Those who survived recognized truth in a message as old as time. Without that, the novel message would have been of no worth. Can you see and feel the truth in these familiar words of President Benson about what your inheritance of time is worth? Listen to what he said, almost it seems in passing, as he began to speak. The words are close to those you've heard before.

Young men of the Aaronic Priesthood, you have been born at this time for a sacred and glorious purpose. It is not by chance that you have been reserved to come to earth in this last dispensation of the fulness of times.

Your birth at this particular time was foreordained in the eternities.

*You are to be the royal army of the Lord in the last days. You are “youth of the noble birthright.” [“To the ‘Youth of the Noble Birthright,’” *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 43]*

When I heard those words I thought of a boy with a noble birthright, but lacking what many of you have. He was born on November 22. Thirteen days later his father was buried. He was named and blessed by the bishop of his ward, Edwin Wooley. The name he was given by the bishop was Heber Jeddy Ivins Grant. Bishop Wooley said of the occasion, “I was only the instrument in the hands of his dead father . . . in blessing him.” The bishop later remarked, “Heber Grant is entitled to be one of the Apostles, and I know it” (*The Presidents of the Church*, ed. Leonard J. Arrington [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986], p. 212).

People then and since have called Heber J. Grant a “child of promise.” He was. But his departed father didn’t make the promises to the child. His Heavenly Father did. Your Heavenly Father did—the same Father who chose you to come into this time and place to hold, honor, and nurture those who hold his power.

Bishop Wooley felt Heber had a right to be an apostle, as his father had been. You have a right. You are a royal child of God, a child of promise, chosen from among many to be here and to have your royal inheritance, time in the fulness of times.

Investing Our Time

One young man changed forever my feelings about the value of this gift, and what it means to be a child of promise. Bob Allen was an undergraduate at Stanford University when I was his bishop. He left his schooling to serve a mission in Japan. He came back to school, took up his studies, and lived as many of you do, in a world of too many demands and too little time.

One day I was sitting at my desk in the graduate school of business at Stanford, head down, struggling with the blue books and papers that bear down on your professors as much as they do

on you. The door was open into a hallway. It must have been late because the hall was dark, and I expected no one. Suddenly I sensed someone was standing motionless in the doorway. I looked up and saw two people. They were standing side-by-side, looking at me and smiling. I remember to this hour that their faces seemed to shine. Suddenly, Bob Allen stepped between them and, smiling as broadly as they were smiling, said, “These are two new bishops from Japan.” They could speak little English, but I could tell they loved Bob Allen and, because of something he must have told them, they loved me.

After a few awkward minutes of trying to talk with them through Bob, they left. I thought then, as I have many times since, how remarkable it was that he had found time to spend days with those young men from Japan.

Within a few years I left Stanford for Idaho. I’d heard little of Bob, except that he had graduated from Stanford and had been accepted at the University of Utah medical school. Then I got a phone call from a Stanford friend. He told me Bob had been killed. He told me that Bob’s parents would grant me the chance to say a few words at his funeral. Just before the service I met with friends, Bob’s and mine. I asked to know more about how the accident had occurred.

Bob had been killed mountain climbing, climbing through clouds and storms to find a way of escape for his companions on the mountainside. I felt impressed to ask one who had been there, “What was he doing in camp on the climb?” He said Bob had taken his missionary lessons, in Japanese. He’d studied them again the night before his death. Now, of all the things you might decide to study at night, on a mountain-climbing trip, in the summer before medical school, why would you choose that? Well, I think I know why Bob did. I think he would have heard the words of President Benson and known they were true, the words he lived by: “You have been born at this time for a sacred and glorious purpose.”

I spoke in a sacrament meeting in Tokyo ten years later. The person who introduced me mentioned I had been at Stanford. Two young

people, a couple, rushed to me after the meeting and said, “Did you know Bob Allen? We love him.” Just a few months ago I was in Tokyo again. Of all the excellent presentations made to me, one seemed most remarkable. I asked to see the man who made it. He was introduced, and then he said, “We have met before, at Stanford University.” He was the young man, now older, who had stood with his fellow bishop in my office door. He told me about his life, and the life of the other man, now a great leader in Japan. In that moment I learned again, in my heart as well as in my head, what it means to have a royal inheritance of time, and how a child of promise who believes the promises can invest it—even just a little of it—to produce returns for eternity.

Because of that moment I’ve come to understand something that happened to me long ago. I must have been in my early teens. It was morning, because I can remember the light coming through the small basement window. And I was in a hurry, another sign of morning. I don’t know whether I had been praying, but I felt, not heard, a voice. It was an impression, which I knew then was from God. It was this thought, and close to these words: “Someday, when you know who you really are, you will be sorry you didn’t use your time better.” I thought then that the impression was odd, since I thought I was using my time pretty well, and I thought I knew who I was. Now, years later, I am beginning to know who I am, and who you are, and why we will be so sorry if we do not invest our time well.

One of the Covenant People

Nephi saw us. He knew who we really are. Do you remember what he saw, recorded now in the fourteenth chapter of 1 Nephi? “And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few” (verse 12). Nephi knew that not many would have what we have, the gospel of Jesus Christ. But look at what else he saw, what else he knew about you and me:

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people

of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory. [1 Nephi 14:14]

That’s who you are. You are a child of promise, one of the covenant people in the last days. You’ve been given time, how much you don’t know, in the period that Nephi saw. You not only have the promises, you know what they are, and you know when God offers a promise, and when you accept it on his terms, he always keeps his promises. You remember from another place in the Book of Mormon: “For the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on, until all his promises shall be fulfilled” (Mormon 8:22).

One of the things that makes you a child of promise is that you know God’s promises, and you know their purpose is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. You will invest your time wisely if you value the promises. And you will value the promises when they work in your life and in the lives of people you love. And they will work when you invest your time in accepting them and offering them to others. And real investment of time happens only with sustained effort motivated by faith.

You will gain confidence in your ability to invest your precious time well by gaining three other confidences. First, you must gain confidence that God keeps his promises. Second, you must gain God’s confidence that you will always keep the promises, not that you choose to make but that he asks you to make. And third, you must help others gain confidence that God keeps his promises.

You can gain confidence that God keeps his promises by trying them. That’s why I so appreciate those commandments to which God has attached an explicit promise. I see those commandments as schoolmasters. And I try to put them high on my list of things to do, because I know their value for changing my heart and building my power to invest my time. You probably did it today, perhaps unconsciously.

One of those commandments with promise came to the top of my list a week ago. I was in California, in a situation often the case when I am

on assignments, when it appeared I would not have the opportunity to partake of the sacrament. I thought of the promises. And because I was not on a conference assignment and because I knew some ward schedules in the area, we got to the Palo Alto First Ward sacrament meeting.

I chose not to spend my time, but to invest it. When that young priest blessed the sacrament, I thought of John the Baptist and Joseph Smith. I thought of what it means to live in a time where the promise that young man made for me was authorized by God. He said if I remembered the Savior and kept his commandments, I would always have his Spirit to be with me. Because I made that promise in faith, and kept it, I've had a remarkable week. God kept his promise, made by his servant. I hope those two young men in the Palo Alto Ward know that God honored the promise they spoke. God knows who they really are, and so do I. I hope they do.

Seeking the Kingdom First

If President Benson has been successful in helping us sense who we are, there are a whole series of things you will be adding to the top of your lists of things to do, if they weren't already there. Reading the Book of Mormon thirty minutes a day, paying tithing, paying a fast offering, and keeping the Sabbath will all be there. And when you carry out those commitments with faith, you will quickly come to know that God keeps his promises.

Now, you might say, "But Brother Eyring, you've just made my problem worse. Now, I've added new tasks to my list and I've put them at the top. If my worry before was that I might fail in my work, now I'm even more worried. You know that at least some of the people I'll compete with when I get out of here will put work first and spiritual things last, or never. Will I always be second-rate in my work if I'm a child of promise?"

You can take comfort. Whenever I've had unusual success in a financial investment I've started with great partners. Although you are very much the junior partner, you have been invited to invest your time not alone but with God. Here is the promise he has made:

But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted. [Jacob 2:18-19]

That seems to me a remarkable promise and a reassurance. The requirement is that you seek God first. This evening there may be little time left when you're done with the studies some of you may have left to complete before the first class tomorrow. Suppose the first class is mathematics and you have a long problem set due. You may be tempted to try the straight spiritual approach—take no thought and hope you will be given a completed problem set in the hour you need it. I recommend against it—not that I doubt the ravens could deliver you the finished work, but there is a better way, as I read in the book of Jacob.

I'd go back to your room and start with the Book of Mormon. I'd read it long enough that I began to feel hope in Christ. For me, that always happens. Now, even though that is only a start toward obtaining the full hope in Christ spoken of in Jacob, some of the promise begins to work in me. My motives change. I start to want different things. I may even write a letter to someone I've thought of suddenly, or make a phone call. But I'm changed two ways. First, I've been moved to action, to read the Book of Mormon with real intent and then to try to serve God, and serve him well. And second, I'm determined to solve those math problems for the power learning can confer. It may not confer riches, but it will give me the power to liberate the captive. My sons who are here wish I'd sought a little harder, worked a few more problem sets, and been qualified now to administer relief to them as they are afflicted with their own math problem sets.

My experience has been that the promise in Jacob is true. When I have sought the kingdom first, I have been directed to seek other things later. And whatever intensity and singleness of heart I brought to my service to God has been extended into whatever else I have been led to

seek. Seek seems to be the key word. That is a far cry from “put in your time.” If you invest your time with faith and great energy, the promise by the Lord in Jacob is sure.

The fact that God promises our motives will be changed and shaped to better ends as a reward should also direct the way you invest your time. You know your lists of things to do may not even include tasks of the greatest importance to God. You may have had the experience, as I have had, to pray over alternative courses of action and be told the alternatives you are considering don't even address what really matters.

Now, you need to add tasks to your lists that will give God confidence you will keep the promises he asks of you, not that you choose for yourself. That could test you some, since you may have always favored the scripture that suggests you should do some things without being commanded. But even there, it's crucial to feel a desire that what you choose is what God would want, particularly when you are so important and rare a servant to him. You want his confidence in you as much as you need your confidence in him.

Coming to Know His Will

One of the great promises attached to prayer with real intent, scripture study, teaching the gospel, visiting the sick, and in all ways seeking God is that you come to know what he wants. If you invest long enough, you can qualify for perfect confidence from God. The scriptures describe that happening. Nephi, the son of Helaman, earned that promise and its fulfillment.

You remember that he and his brother, Lehi, left their positions to take up the ministry. And Nephi struggled and met rebuff, as some of you have. But he persevered. The Lord spoke to him when he was discouraged but still diligent:

And now, because thou has done this with such unweariness, behold, I will bless thee forever; and I will make thee mighty in word and in deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word, for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary, to my will. [Helaman 10:5]

The promise to you and me in the last days is not that the power of God will be poured out on us to do whatever we think is best, but to do what is God's will. And the promise is that after seeking him and serving his children with unweariness, we will come to know his will. The promise is not just that I will have the power to do what's on my list of tasks, but that I will know what to put there. On those occasions when I have known what should be there, I've found myself glancing at it as a source of joy, not of anxiety.

The Greatest of All Returns

Finally, our capacity for investing time well will hinge on our desire to offer others the chance to gain confidence in the promises of God. We've talked about investing time, guided by the promises of God and by our wanting what he wants. What he wants is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man, so much of your time will be invested with the return to come to others. You can take that as a source of great optimism.

First, and perhaps less important, the returns finally do come back to you, particularly when you focus on giving instead of getting. You remember the promise in Luke:

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. [Luke 6:38]

But even better you have the promise of Abraham. That guarantees what in financial investments you'd call compounding. An investment compounds when every return goes to work, without your doing anything further to produce more returns. Offering the gospel has the same effect, because of the promise made to Abraham, and to you. Abraham was promised both that his seed would hear the gospel and that they would take it to others. Missionaries, mothers, and home teachers invest time that will compound forever.

Now you may object this way: “I go out and make my visits and call on people, but I don't see

any results.” Another latter-day prophet helped me with that. President David O. McKay said this:

Man is a spiritual being, a soul, and at some period of his life everyone is possessed with an irresistible desire to know his relationship to the Infinite. . . . There is something within him which urges him to rise above himself, to control his environment, to master the body and all things physical and live in a higher and more beautiful world. [True to the Faith, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 244]

Even people who seem careless and uninterested in spiritual things will at some time reach out to know who they are and who God is and whether they are a child of God and whether there really are promises. You won’t know when, but it will come.

Some of you have invested months and years trying to offer people you love the gospel of Jesus Christ—to people who have not yet accepted it. Take heart. Alma the Younger, when he came to the point of extremity, remembered the words of his father and it saved his eternal life. God may yet bless you with that greatest of all returns for the investment of your time, that the words of truth you spoke will be remembered in that moment of spiritual yearning by the person you loved enough to offer the most precious thing you ever received.

Well, we have talked about investing your inheritance, the time that God has given you, and the power you have to dispose of it wisely. Tonight and tomorrow and the next day you and I will ask God what to do with our time. I promise you that he will answer those prayers, because he

is in need of servants to reach out to his children. Don’t be surprised if he asks you to reach out to them with kindness and with the gospel of Jesus Christ. You can be confident that the promises he has made will be fulfilled. He will, through you, touch the hearts of others, if not always on the timetable you would choose. And they will then, in turn, be touched and reach out to others, multiplying the effects of your investment of time and effort and faith.

Now, I haven’t solved the problem of your busy schedules. You will still feel you are in a hurry and you will still find yourself not reaching the end of every list. In fact, you may find your list changing and even growing larger. But you can have peace and confidence in your choices.

I pray you will feel that peace and that you will feel gratitude for having been blessed with the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, with living prophets, and with the sure promise of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I pray you will have confidence in God’s promises, gain his confidence, and offer to others the promises you have as a child of promise.

I bear you my testimony that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith by the power of God restored all the ordinances and covenants that give direction and certitude to your lives. I bear you my testimony that Ezra Taft Benson is a living prophet of God. I am blessed to meet with him frequently, and I have felt the power of his prophetic calling. I pray we may have his sense of urgency to invest all of the time God may grant us in carrying out whatever task God may give us as his child of promise. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.