

Lessons That Have Helped Me

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I haven't been known too much for being nervous when I have to be in front of people. I remember the first time I was going to speak in general conference and was loading the car in Provo, getting ready to go up there, and my daughter-in-law said, "You may not be nervous, but it would be interesting to write a book on how to pack to speak in conference." I had several tubes of lipstick and two or three pairs of earrings and a couple of pairs of shoes, and all of the things that you might need just in case you had an emergency.

I reached in my pocket today and noticed that I have a parking sticker for the ZCMI parking plaza. I think I must have everything I need now, so I guess I'm ready for this talk.

It would be difficult for me to put into words how much I love Brigham Young University. This academic year is my anniversary, since I was a BYU freshman in 1952–53. When I graduated from Spanish Fork High School, I received a scholarship to BYU for \$25. That was tuition for one quarter. My problem at that time was that I didn't have any money to go with the \$25 to pay my other expenses. I'd had part-time work in high school, and that had provided for new sweaters and new shoes, but no savings account. So I reluctantly turned

over the scholarship to the alternate and committed myself to a full-time job. I found in a short time that even though I was making more money, more sweaters and shoes didn't satisfy. It was a bleak day for me when many of my friends left for college that fall. I thought my life was over, and I was only eighteen. The following year I had saved enough money to get myself started in college. I will always be aware that choices for learning and growth, and those kinds of opportunities, seem as natural as our desire to eat. I have always been appreciative of that experience that happened here and the doors that it opened for me.

I've heard a great deal about the outstanding student body at this university now. I know about your credentials, and I could very well be intimidated by those lofty credentials, but I am reminded of a student who said of her first semester, "I was so overwhelmed at being here. I wondered how I ever got in. By the second semester, I wondered how my roommates got in."

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You probably wouldn't realize how much I think of you as I walk around here and as I interact at athletic and cultural events, and especially when I try to find a parking place. That wasn't a problem in my day.

I live very near BYU, and when I served in the state legislature, the BYU campus was part of my legislative district. So I've had a chance to listen to you, and I've had a chance to represent you. As I look out at you, I know that some of you must be concerned about rent money. And some of you must be worried about whether or not you will get a summer job. Will your scholarship be renewed? Will you get into graduate school? Is my major really what I want, or is it what my parents want? Will I ever really fall in love?

Since becoming a Church leader, the most common question I am asked is, "Is it harder for young people today?"

Is it harder? Is it harder for you than it was for me? I don't know the answer to that, but I do have faith in a living prophet who has said that you young people were prepared before you were born for a sacred and glorious purpose. I know you were prepared for this time. The prophet has also warned, however, that the world shouts louder than the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. Have you noticed any worldly messages? Can they be distracting?

As I have considered my assignment for today, I have thought about your challenges. I have wished that my talk with you could be in my kitchen. Often young people say to me that their greatest challenge is the media. I want to say, "Why don't you just turn it off?" But I know young people don't like to be told what to do. Then I think of what I might say, and I think today I'd like to talk to you as if we were speaking in my kitchen.

I remember a conversation I had in the kitchen with my own daughter when she was making a decision about marriage and about graduate school. I said, "Jane, I have such confidence in your ability to figure out the future

because your future will be different from mine. Let me tell you some of the things that have helped me and let me tell you some of the things that haven't."

The greatest advantage that a parent or teacher has is the perspective of time. I might add that it's the only advantage—every other advantage is yours. It helps me to see what has happened in people's lives because of the decisions they've made and the choices they've made. That's one of the ways we get spiritual insights from the scriptures. We have so many stories in the scriptures of what has happened in people's lives according to the choices they have made.

I'd like to share today some of the lessons that have helped me in making decisions and honoring commitments. The first two lessons that I'm going to speak about have to do with the work effort.

The first lesson is the value of work as service, not just as a means of earning money or gaining power. I learned this particular lesson very young. As a young girl I often went with friends to pick cherries in the summer for a local farmer. I remember one very hot day in July when we had eaten our sack lunches under a tree. We were very weary, and we decided not to go back to work in the afternoon but instead to strike for higher wages. (Labor unions were big in the news those days.) We felt a sudden power and adulthood as we sat in the shade on our overturned buckets. I was so eager to report to my family later in the day about our mature negotiations with the farmer. My mother was normally a very gentle person, and it surprised me that she expressed great disappointment in me. She was so upset that we had inconvenienced that farmer when he had a crop in need of picking. I never did learn whether I was worth more than three cents a pound, but it was a permanent lesson to me that in our family we valued service and the needs of others more than power and money.

Today is my mother's eighty-ninth birthday. I'd like to wish her happy birthday in public and thank her for the many lessons that she has taught me. It was nice to learn that you could feel a little bit noble in the top of a cherry tree.

Since that time it has been reassuring for me to learn that many great people I know work for much less money than they are worth because service is a greater value to them than money. Whatever career or profession you pursue, consider the value of service.

The second lesson also has to do with work. *The second lesson that has helped me is learning the value of work as a continual preparation, not just as a job or a destination.* It's a process of preparation. I remember one day in a Sunday School class I was teaching. We were talking about success in a gospel setting—the kind of success that leads to spiritual maturity. LaVell Edwards was a member of my class. I remember LaVell saying, "I hear many people talk about the *will to win*. In describing a great athlete, occasionally we hear the words, 'He just has the will to win.'" LaVell said, "To tell you the truth, I don't know exactly what that means, but there is one characteristic that I look for above all others, and that attribute is the *will to prepare*."

Those who have a will to prepare probably have as many reasons to quit and give up as those who keep going, but the difference shows itself in commitment and a willingness to work. My father-in-law, Wayne B. Hales, was a physics professor here at this university—his name is over one of the doors in the science building. (My love for him is another connecting link to this university.) May I read a few lines about his work and continued preparation from his journal. This would have been about 1916–1920.

During my sophomore year at BYU, I took two courses under Professor A. B. Christensen . . . who became the president of Ricks College. I must have pleased him as a student because two years later he

came to BYU and employed me as a teacher of physics and mathematics at a salary of \$1,000 for the eight or nine months of teaching. . . . One of the bad features about being a school teacher is that you are only employed and paid for half of your time. A teacher is employed for 180 days a year. . . . This first year school was cut short because the Board of Trustees or the Church ran out of money. We closed school in early April and my salary was cut proportionally. I went to work in Sugar City, ten miles [away] tearing down old sugar factory bins. [A job in the coal mines in Eureka] kept us solvent until school started again in late September.

Our second year we saw our way clear for me to attempt some graduate study during the spring and summer quarter. I applied for admission in Graduate School at Chicago University where two Nobel Prize winners in Physics were full professors. They were Andrew A. Mickelson and Robert A. Millikan. [My husband, by the way, was named after Robert Millikan the physicist.]

I secured a room for \$40 per quarter and I often lived, believe it or not, on 47 cents per day.

A few years later, as Dad Hales was serving as president of Snow College, he decided to take his wife, four little children, and their very small savings and go to California to pursue a Ph.D.

Although the economic situation now seems amusing to us, the value of work as continual preparation can be equally important today. That desire for learning and growth is real. Don't let the world or challenges distract you from that.

I remember a great violin teacher who said he was often asked about natural talent, gifts, and innate ability. He said, "It is my experience that most people just quit too soon."

Isn't it easy to say when we see someone excel, "Isn't she gifted?" or "Wouldn't it be wonderful to be as talented as he is?" But most of the time, it just means that person has continued to prepare. You are all gifted, but

you must continue to work to develop the gifts.

I remember listening to Sandra Day O'Connor speak at a graduation at Stanford University. She reported that after her graduation from law school, the only job she could get was as a clerk. What did she do? Talk about discrimination? No. She took the job. She continued to work. She continued to prepare. She could not have known at that time that she would one day be serving in the United States Supreme Court, but her readiness resulted from her continued work and preparation.

The third lesson I would like to mention is the value of developing character rather than seeking popularity or fame. My husband practiced medicine, and whenever he was asked to write a letter of recommendation for a student applying to medical school, he told them this experience that he had with one of his classmates.

As you know, it isn't easy to get into medical school, and as you would guess, freshman students are not only enthusiastic but are committed to very hard work. My husband said he still remembers going to his first examination at the University of Utah. The honor system was in place. As the professor passed out the examination and left the room, he said some classmates started to pull out little cheat papers from pockets and from under their books. He said, "My heart began to pound, and I realized how difficult it is to compete with cheaters." It appeared that this was a practice that must have been common in some settings in the past. About then a tall, thin student stood up in the back of the room and said, "I left my hometown and put my wife and three little children in an upstairs apartment to go to medical school, and I'll turn in the first one of you who cheats and YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT!" They believed it. My husband said he looked like Abraham Lincoln. There were many sheepish expressions, and those cheat papers started to disappear as fast as they had appeared. It's interesting that that class graduated the largest

graduating class in the history of the school. That young man set a standard of hard work and cooperation instead of dishonesty. That man cared more about character than popularity. When I heard the name of J. Ballard Washburn to be sustained as a member of the Quorum of Seventy, I remembered that he was that medical student. Whether or not J. B. had been called to be a General Authority, I realized his name would have been known for good wherever he was. He developed character!

After relating this experience as he remembered it, my husband would say to the student, "If you will work to develop that kind of character, I will write the letter of recommendation for you."

I remember a civics teacher in eighth grade who taught me about character. This teacher had been giving us lessons on government and citizenship. One day he paused, took a long look out at the class, and said,

Let me tell you about one of the greatest men I have ever met. He lives in Provo, Utah. He walks to work each day. He owns his own business and provides employment for others. He is honest in his dealings with his fellowmen. He provides a living for his wife and children whom he loves and cares for. He serves others in church and community. He and his family go to church each Sunday and are honest in their commitments to their Heavenly Father.

I remember feeling almost a little bit bored as the list went on and on, and I thought to myself, "What's so great about that? Doesn't everyone do that?" It seemed so normal. Is it normal? Could we make the world a better place by developing that kind of character? It's that kind of character that sustains families, communities, and nations. It doesn't get any better than that.

The fourth lesson I have learned is the lesson of the great value of stable and caring relationships, the kind of relationships that provide an atmosphere

of trust and support where growth can take place.

The day after I received my call to be the Young Women president, I received a call from my freshman English teacher. She introduced herself on the phone and said, "You probably don't remember me." I quickly added, "I surely do." We visited and I said, "Do you know what I remember about you?" She was curious. I told her that I knew college was supposed to be hard, but I had breezed through some early exams on grammar and then turned in a couple of fairly flimsy essays. One day when I walked into class my teacher said, "Miss Callister, why do you get B's?" I wanted to say, "Well, you graded my paper." But then she added, "You are an A student, you know!"

Then my teacher said, "Well, do you know what I remember about you?" I was curious. She told me that I had defended my use of a comma (commas were really important in those days). Then she said, "You convinced me with your reasoning, and I always taught it that way after that."

What a great value are stable and caring adults, those who cause you to stretch and respond to a higher potential, those who never forget. We need family and friends and teachers who don't forget.

I received another call from my landlady when I was a newlywed and my husband was in medical school. Do you know what I remembered about her? She had lowered our rent when we had our first baby. When my husband later owned apartments in Provo, I reminded him often of that landlady, especially when he rented to young marrieds. Work to develop stable and caring relationships.

You might start with your roommates; they will never forget. When I was a sophomore at BYU, eight of us knelt together for prayer each morning at 6:30 and then had breakfast together in our old apartment on Second East. That was preparation for eight stable and caring families. This is a time when you rehearse

the characteristics and attributes that will prepare you for marriage and family.

I feel concerned when I hear of roommates who never even speak to each other, let alone eat together. But they feel they will be prepared for wonderful and lasting marriages. Lasting relationships take the kind of support that requires commitment and doing things together.

On Valentine's Day I read an article on happy marriages. It said if you have to choose between love and commitment, choose commitment. Isn't that interesting? This is the time to develop attributes that build stable and caring relationships. Don't forget to value those who nurture you.

In recent years I have been very impressed and have an increased testimony of how much our Heavenly Father loves all of his children. I have felt that love through those who serve him, and I have felt that love through those who need him.

I've thought of the things I have learned since serving in the Young Women presidency. When I was called to be a counselor to Sister Ardeth Kapp, she was going on a trip to the Northwest (Eugene, Oregon) to do some leadership training. She said, "Why don't you go along with me? You can just get a feel for what we do when we go out and do leadership training. You won't have to do anything." She reassured me not to worry. We had that plane ride, made a transfer in Portland, and then, after we had landed in Eugene and gotten off the plane, she said, "Now, there will be four firesides. You take twenty-five minutes and I'll take twenty-five minutes." Then she told me we'd divide the time in sacrament meeting, that I could speak to one of the Young Women's groups, and the list went on.

I remember the first time I stood up at the pulpit with Sister Kapp sitting there behind me. I looked back at that big smile on her face and I thought, "Why am I not nervous?" Then I realized why I should be. She had told me to

get a new set of scriptures because we never check luggage. I stood up at the pulpit not very well prepared, and as I turned to the scriptures I found all of my pages were glued together.

There I was, trying to get my pages unglued, and then there was Ardeth Kapp with her scriptures that had little fans and ribbons and lights—they just did all of these wonderful things. I looked at her and thought she would have gladly given me those scriptures, but how much better that she would trust and respect me enough to know that I could get those pages unglued and I could get myself prepared.

I’ve thought about that so often, and I’ve thought about little children. As toddlers learn to walk and they fall down and they get back up we smile—we know that it’s normal to stumble. We give hugs and reassurance and encouragement, and then the growth process continues. That’s the wonderful thing about caring environments, the affection and encouragement that allows us to try, to start over, to do again, and to even correct mistakes when we need to. Stable and caring relationships help make it happen.

The last and the most important lesson I have learned throughout my life is the value of faith, not just intellectual discovery. It’s easy to sell yourself short if you don’t understand your own divine potential. I love the words of Elder Neal Maxwell when he said, “Trust in the Lord as he leads you along. He has things in mind for you that you can’t know right now, but will unfold to you as you continue to prepare.”

Things of the Spirit are understood by the Spirit. It is sometimes easy to reason away truth with our logical minds, but how thankful I have been for caring adults and teachers who have taught me and have shown me by their lives their commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I have thought a good deal about the lessons learned from Korihor, whose story is told in the thirtieth chapter of the book of

Alma. Korihor is described in the heading as an antichrist, but I’m not sure that he started out that way. Have you ever thought that possibly Korihor started out as a college student with lots of questions? Although his questioning may have begun honestly, he made two really bad mistakes. First, he denied his faith. He denied the Light of Christ that had been given to him. Second, he started to preach false doctrine to others. Alma, his leader, bore his testimony to Korihor, and then Korihor made another mistake. Rather than listening to his leader and listening and relying on the Spirit, he defended his position with logic and became more argumentative. He demanded that he be given a sign. Korihor was given a sign. He was struck dumb. He didn’t perhaps intend for the sign to have such an effect on him personally, but often the consequences of our mistakes do affect us personally.

Verses 52 and 53 of chapter 30 are most important, I believe. Korihor acknowledges, “I always knew that there was a God. But behold, the devil hath deceived me” (Alma 30:52–53). Isn’t that interesting? “I always knew.” He had the Light of Christ in him, but Satan deceived him. It is sad to read about what happened to him in his later life as he wandered about as a beggar.

In verse 60 we read, “Thus we see the end of him who perverteth the ways of the Lord; and thus we see that the devil will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them down to hell” (Alma 30:60). Satan does not support those who follow him. He can’t! It is the Lord who sustains; the Spirit sustains; righteousness sustains. That sustenance is not Satan’s to give.

One of the greatest lessons we can learn is how the Spirit sustains those who try to live by faith. When adversity comes, and it does come, the Spirit seems stronger. I bear testimony of the love of our Savior Jesus Christ, not because of my worthiness, but because of his promise to those who believe on his name.

When I was called to be a counselor to Sister Kapp, I was called to the office of the First Presidency. I had said many times before that day that I have never been very much impressed by position, except those positions that have eternal consequence like mother and father, daughter and son. But that day, as I sat in the office of the First Presidency and President Monson took President Benson by the arm to lead him toward my chair to give me a blessing, I realized the prophet of God was going to have his hands on my head.

Following that beautiful blessing, as I stood and turned to face President Benson, I realized that for the year or two previously I had been relating in conversation to his physical health. We had often talked about whether or not President Benson would be able to be at conference, or whether or not he would be well enough to speak.

Because of that, as I turned in that close setting and spoke with him briefly, I was quite unprepared for the magnificence of his spirit. I realized that as our bodies age and grow old and wear out, our spirits continue to grow, and I believe I have a stronger testimony than

I ever had before that time that this time is the time to prepare to meet our Heavenly Father. This life is the time to prepare for that above all other things.

How wonderful it would be if we could feel as worthy as our prophet when we stand before our Heavenly Father to account for the choices we have made in this life.

As I recognize the need for the atonement of Jesus Christ in my life, I value more each day the opportunities we each have to love and serve one another. That's what he asks of us!

This is your time to prepare, to develop character, to increase your faith. I have great confidence in you and your ability to figure out the future.

I normally resist telling people what they should do, but if I were to tell you anything, I would say, "Keep the commandments." Then, as you move forward, making and carrying out your plans, may you feel the blessings and the direction of the Spirit that are promised to those who keep his commandments. This would be my prayer for you, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.