

Understandings of the Heart

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Each time I come to Brigham Young University, I realize that I am standing before a royal army prepared to go out to be in the world but not of the world. BYU is an exceptional university of learning because it was founded on the premise that all subjects taught here would be taught with a special spirit of learning that would allow you to develop your gifts and talents and prepare each of you for the tests of life. It enables those who come here to be temporally and spiritually self-sufficient not just for their own goals and creature comforts, but to stand strong on higher ground in order to lift, help, and serve others.

The Purpose of Life

You are preparing to meet the tests of mortal life. We voluntarily came from the presence of God the Father to this mortal probation with free agency, knowing we would have opposition in all things (2 Nephi 2:11). Our objective is to take upon us the “whole armor” and withstand “the fiery darts of the adversary” with our sword of the Spirit and shield of faith (see 1 Nephi 15:24 and D&C 27:15–18), to endure to the end, and to be worthy to stand and live in the presence of God the Father and his Son

Jesus Christ for all eternity—to achieve what is called eternal life.

Preparation for the Tests of Life

Most of you are in your third decade of learning. The first two decades were years of development and growth in preparation for this third critical decade of learning. This is a period of your life to prepare for the tests of future years. How do you prepare for the tests to come?

“With All Thy Getting Get Understanding”

In the Bible, the book of Proverbs outlines a progression of learning that is important to all of us.

We are taught that basic intelligence (which is innate) and worldly knowledge (which is learned) are the beginnings for our attainment of wisdom.

Robert D. Hales was Presiding Bishop of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 15 March 1988.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom [and knowledge]. [Proverbs 9:10; see also Proverbs 1:7]

But fools despise wisdom and instruction. [Proverbs 1:7]

A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels. [Proverbs 1:5]

From wisdom, if we will listen to wise counsel and take the teachings to our hearts, we will gain an understanding in our hearts.

To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding. [Proverbs 1:2]

*So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;
. . . and liftest up thy voice for understanding;
If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;
Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.*

For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. [Proverbs 2:2–6]

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. [Proverbs 4:7]

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. [Proverbs 3:5–7]

When we have done wrong, Solomon's advice is:

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction:

For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. [Proverbs 3:11–13]

Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.

Get wisdom, get understanding. [Proverbs 4:4–5]

The difference between intelligence and knowledge—at the lower end of the hierarchy of learning—and wisdom—which comes through life's experiences, turning us to the Lord and ultimately to learning in our hearts—is shown in a simple scripture: "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens" (Proverbs 3:19).

There is a great deal of difference between raw intelligence, knowledge, wisdom, and finally, the understanding with which the Lord established the heavens. This learning process applies to each of us, but especially to you who are studying at this unique university because this university recognizes the progression of learning that begins with God-given, innate intelligence. It recognizes knowledge through your courses of study and then the attainment of wisdom—recognizing obedience to laws, ordinances, and commandments—ultimately leading to an understanding in your hearts of true gospel principles that far exceed the teachings of men. This education leads us to use our gifts and talents in selfless service by helping others and caring for the needy.

The importance of understanding in one's heart is that our faith in believing becomes a full knowledge of understanding, and it causes us to control our actions.

In three decades of counseling I have become aware of many ways we may be tested. Here are but a few tests that those assembled

here today may have to face in their lives. Will you be prepared? How will you respond?

1. The test for some will be being single and lonely. Are you prepared to be self-sufficient and productive, and are you prepared to be of help to others?

2. The test for some will be being married to the wrong person, resulting in abuse and divorce.

3. Then, the test may be to provide for a family without a partner's support.

4. Some will have the test of not being able to have children. The test may come even when you have lived faithfully, abiding by moral laws and commandments of chastity, faithfulness, fidelity, and love to an eternal companion. A sobering thought, but one that should be noted in your prayers, is that national studies have shown that one in five men and two in five women will have complications or will be unable to have children. Sometimes a physical law circumvents a spiritual goal, and you may have to consider the alternative of adoption. Do not base your testimony on one goal and allow bitter disappointment to prevent you from enjoying your companionship and the greater goal of eternal progression.

5. The test for some will be having the children who can both be the joy and the trial of your life.

6. Some will have the test of being widowed or will experience the death of a loved one. Do not become angry and blame your departed loved one for leaving you alone. Do not blame God for allowing it to happen or yourself for having done something to cause the death.

7. Some will have the test of illness and poor health.

8. Some will have friends and companions betray their trust.

9. For some the test will be having financial woes of employment failure, economic depression, or unwise investments.

Invulnerability

Wouldn't we all like to avoid the tests and trials of this mortal probation?

In Greek mythology, Achilles was the hero of Homer's *Iliad*. In addition to Homer's historical account of Achilles, later authors developed fables or folklore about Achilles and his mother, Thetis.

Thetis, in an attempt to make Achilles immortal, concealed him by night in fire and anointed him by day with ambrosia. According to some accounts, Thetis also endeavored to make Achilles immortal by dipping him in the River Styx. She succeeded in making Achilles' body invulnerable and immortal with the exception of the ankles by which she held him.

Achilles grew up to be an invincible warrior, leading the Greek army against Troy. His death is mentioned in *The Odyssey*. He is said to have been killed by Apollo, either in the likeness of Paris, or by an arrow of Paris directed by Apollo to his only vulnerability—his ankle (the Achilles tendon).

Wouldn't every mother like to find the secret of protecting her children, making them invulnerable from the fiery darts of the adversary?

Unfortunately, we cannot protect ourselves from the slings and arrows of misfortune. In fact, we are told to carry the shield of faith to protect us from the fiery darts of the adversary. We also know from Lehi's advice to his son Jacob that there must be "opposition in all things" in this mortal probation (2 Nephi 2:11). A basic reason for our learning experiences in this life is to enable us to endure to the end. Our challenges, learning experiences, and the opposition we come up against are supposed to strengthen us, not defeat or destroy us.

Joseph Smith pleaded with the Lord in Liberty Jail for the suffering Saints. Joseph, with several companions, had been in Liberty Jail under miserable conditions for several months. He pleaded,

*O God, where art thou? . . .
How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine
eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal
heavens the wrongs of thy people . . . , and thine ear
be penetrated with their cries?*

*. . . how long shall they suffer these wrongs and
unlawful oppressions, before thine heart shall be
softened toward them, and thy bowels be moved
with compassion toward them? [D&C 121:1–3]*

The Lord's clear answer was calming:

*My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity
and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment;
And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt
thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.
[D&C 121:7–8]*

Our hurts, as difficult as they are to endure and as unbearable as they may seem to us in the present tense of time, are, in the Lord's eternal perspective, but "a small moment." The test is whether we endure the adversity and affliction well, without losing our faith and breaking commandments.

Joseph was told in his difficult circumstances that

*God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy
Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy
Ghost. [D&C 121:26]*

We can have that same gift if we remain faithful.

How important it is during troubled times, when we are tested, that we do not do anything to lose the Holy Ghost's gentle persuasions, comfort, and peace that will give us assurance to make the correct choices in life in order to weather the storm and bring us closer to God's ways—not man's ways.

Joseph Smith was told:

*Thy friends do stand by thee, and they shall hail
thee again with warm hearts and friendly hands.*

*Thou art not yet as Job; thy friends do not con-
tend against thee, neither charge thee with trans-
gression, as they did Job. [D&C 121:9–10]*

Our friends are important at all times, especially in times of need when we are depressed with feelings of loneliness and despair.

Choosing our friends wisely is important. In times of trouble, do your friends stand by you? What kind of a friend or companion are you?

Often we choose our friends by their physical appearance and personalities. The best dancer, the most fashionable, the same geographic home area (city or rural, east or west), the most athletic, the sharpest car, the most handsome, the most beautiful, the most charming personality, the most intelligent, the richest, or the poorest are just a few of the criteria for selecting dates or friends. These are all superficial.

The first test of friendship and companionship is knowing that in their company it is easier to live according to the commandments you have been taught and know are important to happiness.

The second test of real friendship and companionship is whether you are asked as a condition of their friendship or companionship to choose between their way and the Lord's way. For example, true friendship does not exist if a condition of that friendship is to participate in breaking moral laws or the Word of Wisdom with phrases like: "Try it just once," "Everyone does it," "Who is going to know?" "Show me that you really love me."

My point in naming a few of the tests we face is to remind you that blessings come after the trial of our faith and that opposition is given as an essential element in our mortal probation and spiritual growth even if we are as perfect as Job. Yet Job suffered the loss of his material possessions, his sons and daughters were taken from him, boils from head to foot were inflicted as a painful physical test,

and he experienced depression as a mental test. In his depression, Job said:

My soul is weary of my life . . . ; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. [Job 10:1]

I should have been carried from the womb to the grave. [Job 10:19]

I am full of confusion. [Job 10:15]

In all of Job's trouble, he wept for him that was in trouble and his soul grieved for the poor. This is the mark of a great man. (see Job 30:25)

In all of Job's trials, he kept his testimony that his Redeemer liveth. At the end of the first chapter of Job it says he "sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

When we are marred spiritually or physically, our first reaction is to withdraw into the dark shadows of depression, to blot out hope and joy—the light of life that comes from knowing we are living the commandments of our Father in Heaven. This withdrawal will ultimately lead us to rebellion against those who would like to be our friends, those who can help us most, even our family. But worst of all, we finally reject ourselves.

Those who are alone and lonely should not retreat to the sanctuary of their private thoughts and chambers. Such retreat will ultimately lead them into the darkening influence of the adversary, which leads to despondency, loneliness, frustration, and to thinking of themselves as worthless. After one thinks of himself as worthless, he then oftentimes turns to associates who corrode those delicate spiritual contacts, rendering their spiritual receiving antennas and transmitters useless. What good is it to associate with and ask advice of someone who is disoriented himself and only tells us what we want to hear? Isn't it better to turn to loving parents, friends, and associates who can help us reach for and attain celestial goals?

And he said: Go and tell this people—Hear ye indeed, but they understood not; and see ye indeed, but they perceived not.

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes—lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and be healed. [2 Nephi 16:9–10]

What can you do to prepare yourself during your college years for the tests and trials of your life?

1. You must learn to work hard toward your goals, to pray for strength and guidance in your daily decisions, always acknowledging "Thy will be done."

2. Study the scriptures, history, biographical literature, and psychology to give you an insight into how others have met life's challenges and, with a testimony, endured to the end.

3. Select friends and an eternal companion from whom you can seek counsel and who will lift you and make it easier to live the commandments by just being together.

4. Learn to be of service and of help to others in their tests no matter how busy you are or how much you are hurting from your own tests and trials of faith.

5. Learn that even in a perfect life the tests and trials will come, but remember that you can bring affliction upon yourself and those near you through your own actions. Be willing to accept the consequences that come and don't blame them on God.

6. Learn that when you have made a mistake, regrets are not enough. Feeling sorry is not enough unless your sorrow brings about a remorse of conscience and a change of heart resulting in true repentance.

7. Learn that true education is not only test scores and grade point averages, but also gaining wisdom through life's experiences, listening to sound counsel, gaining an understanding in your heart, and caring for others

less fortunate. Then, no amount of temptation, testing, trials, or coercion can make you depart from the straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life.

8. Learn that in mortal probation you are here for tests and trials even though you live a perfect life.

9. Learn to know yourself while you are at the university. You are in a laboratory that simulates the world with individual competition and the inner stress of learning. There will never be a better time in your life to have the contemplation and introspection needed to know yourself. Take time to ponder who you are and act accordingly. General education requirements are given not only to give you a well-rounded education, but also to give you an opportunity to assess your intellectual and spiritual strengths and weaknesses. What are your God-given gifts and talents? (see D&C 46)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in his book *The Mortal Messiah*, has said:

Spirits developed an infinite variety and degree of talents while yet in preexistence.

Being subject to law, and having their agency, all the spirits of men, while yet in the Eternal Presence, developed aptitudes, talents, capacities, and abilities of every sort, kind, and degree. During the long expanse of life which then was, an infinite variety of talents and abilities came into being. As the ages rolled, no two spirits remained alike. Mozart became a musician; Einstein centered his interest in mathematics; Michelangelo turned his attention to painting. Cain was a liar, a schemer, a rebel who maintained a close affinity to Lucifer. Abraham and Moses and all of the prophets sought and obtained the talent for spirituality. Mary and Eve were two of the greatest of all the spirit daughters of the Father. The whole house of Israel, known and segregated out from their fellows, was inclined toward spiritual things. And so it went through all the hosts of heaven, each individual developing such talents and abilities as his soul desired.

*The Lord endowed us all with agency; he gave us laws that would enable us to advance and progress and become like him; and he counseled and exhorted us to pursue the course leading to glory and exaltation. He himself was the embodiment and personification of all good things. Every desirable characteristic and trait dwelt in him in its eternal fullness. All of his obedient children started to become like him in one way or another. There was as great a variety and degree of talent and ability among us there as there is among us here. Some excelled in one way, others in another. The Firstborn excelled all of us in all things. [Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, Book 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), p. 23; see also D&C 46]*

Have you given yourself an honest chance to develop your natural skills, or are you limiting your development to the requirements for graduation or a profession without assessing how you will make the greatest contribution and be the happiest during your sojourn on earth?

Before a seventies quorum meeting, one of the seventies was asked if he could play the piano. His response was classic: “I don’t know, I haven’t tried to play the piano.”

Your university educational experience should be a microcosm of life. For this reason, if the opportunity presents itself, serving on committees in student government, social committees, or interacting with the faculty and university administration will simulate civic involvement in your future life. Your social committees and social awareness and interactions are all part of the laboratory in which you are privileged to participate.

Some years ago, when Howard S. McDonald was inaugurated as president of Brigham Young University, in the inaugural address entitled “The Glory of God Is Intelligence,” Dr. Edwin A. Lee said:

While I was an undergraduate at Columbia University, there was a man in attendance already known as the perennial student. He had been left a modest but adequate bequest with the stipulation that it should continue as long as he was engaged in collegiate study: thereafter, the income was to be given to charity. When I returned for graduate work twelve years later, he was still there and he remained a student until he died just a few years ago. It was said that he had been granted every degree offered by Columbia and had taken practically every course. He was a man who was the epitome of erudition. No field of knowledge was foreign to him. He was probably more widely-read than the best of his professors. He was a cultured gentleman. But, he was not a truly intelligent man. Certainly such intelligence as he possessed was not that which is the Glory of God. Inherently he was selfish. He never married. He was without ambition or influence. He was a joke to the students and a freak to the faculty. He knew a prodigious lot, but his real index of intelligence was low, no matter what his I.Q. [Inauguration Services of Howard S. McDonald, 14 November 1945, in BYU Archives, p. 34]

And so knowledge of facts alone can be of little value.

In section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants, we are told to

beware lest ye are deceived; . . . seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given; (v. 8)

For verily I say unto you, they are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, . . . that all may be benefited that seek or that ask of me. . . . (v. 9)

For all have not every gift given unto them . . . (v. 11)

To some is given one, and to some is given another. (v. 12)

The key is “that all may be profited thereby.” May I repeat for emphasis “that all may be profited thereby.”

And all these gifts come from God, for the benefit of the children of God. [D&C 46:26]

And finally, from section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 28 and 29: “He that asketh in Spirit shall receive in Spirit; . . . in order that every member may be profited thereby.”

The reason you are here at the university is not solely to improve your value in the marketplace or for selfish reasons of intellectual gamesmanship. You are here for the eternal perspective of learning, to enable you to stand on higher ground to lift, to serve, and to care for those in need around you, both in your family and in the communities in which you reside. “Thee lift me and I’ll lift thee, and we will ascend together.”

Please remember to give—before you leave this unique institution of learning—appreciation and deserved praise to members of the faculty and staff for their dedication to the eternal principles of learning. Sincere recognition of your teachers’ contributions to your life is small payment for their sacrifices in sharing their gifts and talents with many who pass through without acknowledgment of their service.

Stewardship

In June of 1965, a group of brethren in the Physical Facilities Department of the Church was doing some work outside the Hotel Utah apartment of President David O. McKay. As President McKay stopped to explain to them the importance of the work in which they were engaged, he paused and told them the following:

Let me assure you, Brethren, that some day you will have a personal priesthood interview with the

Savior, Himself. If you are interested, I will tell you the order in which He will ask you to account for your earthly responsibilities.

First, He will request an accountability report about your relationship with your wife. Have you actively been engaged in making her happy and ensuring that her needs have been met as an individual?

Second, He will want an accountability report about each of your children individually. He will not attempt to have this for simply a family stewardship but will request information about your relationship to each and every child.

Third, He will want to know what you personally have done with the talents you were given in the pre-existence.

Fourth, He will want a summary of your activity in your Church assignments. He will not be necessarily interested in what assignments you have had, for in his eyes the home teacher and a mission president are probably equals, but He will request a summary of how you have been of service to your fellowmen in your Church assignments.

Fifth, He will have no interest in how you earned your living, but if you were honest in all your dealings.

Sixth, He will ask for an accountability on what you have done to contribute in a positive manner to your community, state, country and the world.
[From Notes of Fred A. Baker, Managing Director, Department of Physical Facilities]

May we be able to meet these tests with affirmative answers and receive a loving welcome home from the Lord, who we hope will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

It is my fervent desire that each of us will use our God-given intelligence to gain the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding in our hearts to meet life's tests and trials and to endure to the end. May each of us use our gifts and talents to protect, love, and lift others in a caring way is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.