

# *God Did Not Put Us Here to Fail*

JON M. HUNTSMAN, SR.

Good morning, beloved students, faculty, friends, family, and my esteemed brother in the gospel for over 35 years, President Cecil O. Samuelson. I have always treasured our close and respectful relationship, and I say to you, President Samuelson, that Brigham Young could not have selected a better leader than you, who has reached great heights in medicine, in life, and, above all, in integrity. Thank you for such a generous introduction, and thank you to the beautiful choir from whom we have just heard. I am so privileged to be invited to this world-class university. My wife, Karen, and I thank you.

I am truly honored to be here today. May I begin with this simple sentence: God did not put us here to fail. I would say to you, have faith in yourself—believe in what you are doing, and, most important, be a person of integrity. It is totally up to you, and no one else, how your life evolves. Many would like to think that our parents, our professors, or even our bishops are responsible for our future. What we become, who we are, and the footprint we will leave in life is based entirely on our own determination, hard work, education, and sacrifice. Our Heavenly Father expects the best from each of us. We must believe in ourselves. Don't give in when the going gets

rough. You are laying the foundation of a great work, and that great work is your life. Never cut corners, demean other people, or waste time "hanging out." Decide who you are and what your goals entail—then go for the roses. Life has little regard for those who waste time.

My father and grandfather were rural schoolteachers in southern Idaho and Utah, and it was my hope to someday follow their example. But I refused to forsake my dreams, and each day my mind was filled with new ideas and hopes and aspirations. I would never listen to anyone who spoke negatively nor acknowledge that there were shortcomings that could not be overcome. I always thought that the key to life is finding happiness in any given place or time while remembering the great scriptural axiom "Men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25).

People around us cheer when we are happy and positive. Self-pity is the most negative quality of the human spirit. Thus when one is happy and positive and truly believes in himself or herself, great achievements lie ahead.

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Throughout my life, in my heart and soul, I wanted to explore the world—to reach into the unknown—to travel beyond my childhood boundaries. It is so important that we each live our own dream—not someone else’s dream. If what you are doing in your life is not your own dream, then whose is it?

Perhaps I can best explain this through a personal experience.

When I was the age of many of you and was attending college at the very challenging Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, things weren’t going great, at least not academically. It was a struggle for me simply because I didn’t apply myself to the rigorous studies. After my sophomore year I went home and visited with my father. He encouraged me to change my major and to attend a college that was not so difficult. I thought about taking an easier route and remembered the wise statement a radio commentator had recently made. He stated, “Difficulty is one excuse history has never accepted.”<sup>1</sup>

I returned to college my junior year a reinvigorated, new person. I applied myself. I studied diligently. My grades skyrocketed, and upon graduation two years later I was awarded the university’s highest honors. Thus I realized between my sophomore and junior years that it was *my* dream I must live and not my father’s, and that I must achieve it through adversity and hard work.

Making dreams become reality requires great sacrifice and determination. Most people are content to just coast along. Many don’t like to apply their talents and abilities or to put in long hours of work. But to achieve any dream and to make something truly remarkable happen in our lives, we must face adversity head-on, and we must overcome all of the obstacles in our pathway.

Today, obstacles are significant. They are everywhere. It is easy to become a prisoner to abusive behavior when we think there is no possible way out. Just think of the complex

issues of attempted suicide, pornography, drug abuse, eating disorders, sexual identity, and addictions that come in various forms and disguises. These are very real challenges to many people. Every family feels at some point the heartache and pain of watching a loved one or friend falling prey to one of these life-altering demons. Once ensnared, most individuals believe they have little chance of escaping. But I say unto you: Your life’s dream can be achieved. These demons are momentary setbacks. Do not succumb to desperation. Don’t get down on yourself. You can create a pathway to success. There is a road to recovery, and many of us have traveled that road.

With regained balance and confidence in life we can make it. Our dreams can be fulfilled. We should never, never give up hope. We must follow the example of the Little Train That Could, trying to pull its load over the mountain: “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can!”

Today the economy represents a challenge that we have never witnessed before. Some of our families have lost their homes. Some of us, or perhaps our relatives or friends, have lost their jobs. Almost everyone has lost something or has been diminished in some capacity. May I suggest to you that, contrary to public opinion, there is much to be learned from the lessons of our times.

Benjamin Disraeli, a former prime minister of England, stated, “There is no education like adversity.”<sup>2</sup> And it was Sir Winston Churchill, another great British prime minister, who led that nation through the unrelenting struggles of World War II, who stated, “We receive our inspiration from the mountaintops but receive our maturity from the valleys of life.”<sup>3</sup>

Many of us here today are either going through one of the valleys of life or will someday experience one of these challenges or moments of adversity. Remember that adversity determines our character. During times of trial and tribulation, I often think of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the many adversities

that afflicted his life. The Lord brought peace unto his heart during one of these times when He stated, “My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment” (D&C 121:7).

It is always interesting to observe how people react during times of crisis. Indeed, our very own character is formed by the lessons of trial and challenge. Character, in turn, emerges within each of us in our hearts and minds to establish our own personal set of standards—or, as the outside world would refer to it, our personal integrity. Integrity is critical to our lives—and to our dreams of achievement. We must remember that *without* integrity nothing else matters and that *with* integrity nothing else matters. Thus personal integrity, shaped and fashioned and molded to a great extent by adversity and personal trials, determines the person or individual we represent to others.

Again, we must each remember that God did not put us on this earth to fail. We are His children. We are here to succeed. The obstacles placed before us will be many, and in certain cases we may falter or even fail. I love the scripture that states, “He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (D&C 58:42).

I often recall the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The Atonement, of course, is the entire purpose for the restoration of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It provides a means for eternal life. But there is another purpose as well. The Savior’s suffering and struggles in the Garden of Gethsemane and His ultimate Atonement allows each of us to heal from the sins or afflictions of which I spoke earlier. Through the Lord Jesus Christ we don’t have to carry guilt over our shoulders as if it were a 50-pound bag of rocks. We can and should repent and move on. The Lord has provided the way for us to heal and then use our adversities to great advantage in the future. Shakespeare said it best when he simply stated, “Sweet are the uses of adversity.”<sup>4</sup> As we over-

come many imposed limitations or challenges, the door is open for us to do anything in life that is honorable and good. We can follow our dreams and reach the stars and make a big difference in the lives of many.

When I started our company 40 years ago, I had no money. I had worked diligently as a young man to help my family make it through life financially. Although a scholarship had been awarded to me to attend one of America’s most prestigious universities, I worked through college to pay for those extra costs that scholarships don’t cover. Then for several years after graduation I worked for a small company to gain experience and wisdom. I went to graduate school at night and received a master of business administration while having young children at home and serving in a bishopric. Thus, after much preparation, when I decided to form my own company and asked the banks for a loan but was rejected, I said to myself, “No is only the beginning of the conversation.” Filled with confidence, I returned many times to the banker and finally wore him down. He granted me a meager loan, and I began a small business. Step-by-step and acquisition-by-acquisition we grew and expanded. On many occasions, as we built the business, various bankers, attorneys, and accountants would tell me it was impossible to proceed, but I forged ahead because I genuinely believed in myself and was adamant that no one else was going to determine my own personal destiny. And no one else but you will determine your personal destiny.

I thought often of my great-great-grandfather, apostle Parley P. Pratt, and his tribulations as a missionary in England, as the first missionary in South America, and as one of the first missionaries in the Pacific Isles. He was turned down repeatedly. He was mocked. He was jailed with the Prophet Joseph Smith, but he was never discouraged. So how could one of his grandsons possibly give up a great opportunity to open doors for others without

trying repeatedly to accomplish the objective? Throughout these early years of my business, the thought came to me repeatedly that difficulties in life are intended to make us better—not bitter! Roadblocks always seemed to surface, but slowly, over the years, with determination and prayer, a great business evolved.

Has it been a challenge? Of course it has. Almost every day is a struggle for many of us. But we must remain positive. Nothing comes easy. Next year our company celebrates 40 years as a reputable, global enterprise with a respected name. We have fought every day honorably and with fairness to forge ahead. Challenges will affect us every day. We refuse to fall for pyramid schemes or get-rich-quick gimmicks. They are all guaranteed to backfire. We have never been sidetracked by the lure of easy money. That doesn't exist either.

People of integrity balance their lives. Successful people follow President Hinckley's prioritization schedule. He listed our priorities in this order:

1. Our Eternal Spouse
2. Our Eternal Children
3. Loyalty to Our Employer/Profession
4. Commitment to Our Church Calling
5. Attention to One's Personal Fitness and Health<sup>5</sup>

One might ask, why is it so important to strive for excellence as a son or daughter of God? Or, if we succeed, will it really make a difference in the lives of others? We need only look to Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind. He often spoke about our need to be our brother's keeper and to watch over those less fortunate and those who are underserved:

*For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat:  
I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a  
stranger, and ye took me in:*

*Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye vis-  
ited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. . . .*

*And the King shall answer and say unto them,  
Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it  
unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have  
done it unto me. [Matthew 25:35–36, 40]*

On the wall behind my desk, as a daily reminder, hangs the great industrialist Andrew Carnegie's declaration of the law of accumulation of wealth. He stated:

*The duty of the man of wealth [is] to consider all  
surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust  
funds, which he is called upon to administer . . . in  
the manner which, in his judgment, is best calcu-  
lated to produce the most beneficial results for the  
community—the man of wealth thus becoming the  
mere agent and trustee for his poorer brethren.<sup>6</sup>*

My heart is deeply touched every time I embrace patients at the Huntsman Cancer Institute or greet one of the thousands of students who have received our scholarships or embrace the homeless in many countries who have given up on themselves. Wealth, if utilized wisely as the Savior advocated, is indeed a blessing to all involved. On the other hand, an unwise servant can create chaos, misery, and unhappiness if wealth is misdirected or not used for the upliftment and betterment of mankind. Thus our charity will become our legacy.

In your studies you have been taught correct principles with which you must now govern yourselves. Have the courage to be true to what you know is right. Have faith in yourself. You have great power within your human soul—each and every one of you—to accomplish something great. The accumulation and use of wealth for the betterment of others is only one form of greatness. A righteous mother and father stand above all others. Obedient children are a blessing to a family, and a humble soul who loves the Lord can achieve great goodness.

*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.* [Proverbs 3:5]

Our paths will be as plentiful as there are separate individuals in this great Marriott Center today. Never deny yourself the right to reach your individual dreams. You and the Lord, working together, can accomplish anything. Never forget—God did not put us here to fail.

I shall always remember how the precepts of the gospel of Jesus Christ dramatically changed my life. Although my parents were not active in the Church, I always was inspired by the law of tithing. It was a great honor as a young boy to make an appointment with my bishop to pay 50 cents or \$1 or \$2 tithing—earnings from delivering newspapers, mowing lawns, or cleaning out grocery stores. Little did I know that this simple habit would affect my life's work.

In 1970, at the age of 32, I was appointed by the president of the United States to oversee the Welfare, Social Services, and Medicaid Program for the entire United States. It was an enormous task for a young man, but I thrived on my new appointment in Washington, D.C., as part of the presidential administration. Several months into that appointment, I received a call from the White House chief of staff, who asked me if I would immediately come to a meeting in his West Wing office. Nervously, I was interviewed for the next two days to determine if I was the proper candidate to become special assistant to the president of the United States and also serve as White House staff secretary. I had to pinch myself several times to realize that here I was, a young man born and raised in southern Idaho, now one of 14 candidates to possibly become one of the president's right-hand men.

Near the end of the second day, the White House chief of staff looked me squarely in the

eyes and asked a most improbable and unexpected question. He asked, "Are you a full-tithe payer in your church?" Yes, he injected the word *full*.

Without hesitation I said, "Yes, sir, I am. I always have been. It is an honor for me to pay a full tithing to my church."

He said, "No one here in the White House is a member of your faith, but I know enough about your religion to know if you are a full-tithe payer, you are a person of integrity. Thus I am recommending you to the president to become his next assistant."

The very next day I moved my offices into the White House. It was a humbling but joyful experience to know that the result of honoring the priesthood and paying a full tithing not only brings the joys of heaven but also, at times like this, can bring the honors of men.

I have always remembered the wise counsel of President Harold B. Lee. He, like the prophets of the Lord before and after him, helps guide and direct our lives during this mortal journey. I loved President Lee. He quoted a profound statement on one occasion that I have always remembered and that applies to many situations. Quoting Dr. Alfred C. Lane of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he said, "Faith keeps one true in the dark and humble in the spotlight."<sup>7</sup> President Lee was simply telling us what we have been discussing today: that if we are men and women of integrity, we don't need to wonder what happens when the lights go out. We have predetermined our course of action of becoming a person of honor and integrity.

One might question the survival of integrity in today's marketplace of deceit and dishonesty. Let me share this personal story with you, which I hope will show that this is possible. Some 24 years ago my young business was struggling. I needed a partner. A recent economic recession had been devastating to our earnings. I decided to sell 40 percent of our company; we would retain the other 60 percent.

We found a willing and able buyer. After much discussion we arrived at a price for the 40 percent valuation. We shook hands on the deal. Then it painfully took more than six months for the buyer to write the contracts that provided a legally binding agreement between us.

During that six-month period our earnings had increased dramatically, and the business was in a rapid growth mode. Sales were the highest ever. Financial consultants on Wall Street told me that the value of the 40 percent of our company the buyer and I had agreed to six months prior was now worth five times the original amount. Things had changed! Moreover, the first oral agreement, our lawyers told me, was not binding because no legal papers had been signed. Since nothing had been signed in the beginning and since our agreement was based on only a handshake, the buyers felt an obligation to pay a higher price. I admired them for that, and our business desperately needed capital. We were expanding aggressively throughout the United States and some foreign countries, and I had many bills to pay. But I informed the buyers that we must stay with the original agreement. I would not increase their cost! My behavior shocked the entire industry. They could not understand why I would not take hundreds of millions of dollars more. But I was confident that this was the honorable thing to do and explained to them, “A deal is a deal, and a handshake is your bond, and I will not vary therefrom.”

When the president of this large, international company that had purchased the 40 percent passed away, though I didn’t know him well, his family asked me to speak at his funeral. It was truly a great honor.

I mention this story to you, brothers and sisters, with gratitude for the power and spirit of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost acts within each of us as a moral compass. It tells us what is right and what is wrong. We always know when we are not doing the right thing. Patterns of integrity for life should be formed in our

youth; then we never have to struggle with the answers. The Holy Ghost is there to prompt us, and we never have to reason through those promptings. Acting on them can have a positive and powerful and remarkable impact on our lives. Remember, God did not put us here to fail.

Always keep in mind that nothing meaningful can come your way without integrity, and integrity is often challenged by adversity. Never let the accumulation of wealth in itself be a goal. Be creative, work hard, and surround yourself with bright, honest people. Be a straight shooter and follow your dreams. But, above all else, believe in yourself, and between you and the Lord your dreams can and will come true, and in your pursuit of your dream, never, never forget others. It is a privilege to serve others, and I thus close with these lyrics paraphrasing the poem by John Donne:

*No man is an island,  
No man stands alone,  
Each man’s joy is joy to me,  
Each man’s grief is my own.*

*We need one another,  
So I will defend  
Each man as my brother,  
Each man as my friend.<sup>8</sup>*

I love the Lord. It is a great honor to bear the holy priesthood. I revere and sustain our beloved prophet, Thomas S. Monson, and I leave with you my testimony that God lives. He is my Savior and Redeemer. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is restored upon the earth as a blessing to each one of us. I also testify that God will not place adversity in our path without giving us the strength to rise above it. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Edward R. Murrow, *Nominations of Edward R. Murrow and Donald M. Wilson (United States*

Information Agency) *Hearing Before the Committee of Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Eighty-Seventh Congress, First Session, on the Nominations of Edward R. Murrow to Be Director, and Donald M. Wilson to Be Deputy Director, of the United States Information Agency, March 14, 1961* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 3; see also last newscast, 22 January 1961, *In Search of Light: The Broadcasts of Edward R. Murrow, 1938–1961*, ed. Edward Bliss, Jr. (New York: Knopf, 1967), 346.

2. Said by the character Sidney Wilton in Disraeli's novel *Endymion* (1880).

3. Attributed to Winston Churchill; also "Mountaintops inspire leaders but valleys mature them."

4. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, act 2, scene 1, line 12.

5. See Gordon B. Hinckley, "First Presidency Message: Life's Obligations," *Ensign*, February 1999, 2–5; also, Hinckley, "Rejoicing in the Privilege to Serve," *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, 21 June 2003 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 22–24.

6. "Wealth," *North American Review* 148, no. 391 (June 1889): 661–62; see also Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth, and Other Timely Essays* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), 25.

7. Alfred C. Lane in *The Faith of Great Scientists* [a collection of "My Faith" articles from the *American Weekly*] (New York: Hearst Publishing, 1948), 39; quoted by Harold B. Lee in "Sweet Are the Uses of Adversity," BYU devotional address, 7 February 1962; see also Daniel L. Marsh, "The Inaugural Address," Inauguration of Daniel L. Marsh, D.D., LL.D., as Fourth President of Boston University, May 15, 1926, in *Bostonia* 26, no. 4 (July 1926): 77–78: "We stand for the promotion of character, which is what one is in the dark or in the spotlight—that keeps one true in the dark and humble in the spotlight."

8. "No Man Is an Island," words and music by Joan Whitney and Alex Kramer, 1950; lyrics adapted from John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), no. 17.