

The Instrument of Your Mind and the Foundation of Your Character

BOYD K. PACKER

I can see in my mind's eye the students, young adults, gathered in the beautiful new institute building in San Salvador in El Salvador, where I was just seven days ago. I see them in Samoa, Madrid, Pusan, Accra in Ghana, Mendoza, Moscow, Seattle, in Anchorage, in Virginia, and dozens of other places.

To them I say, "Welcome! Bienvenidos! Willkommen! Foon ying! Sdrazvoudje! Yoo koso! And welcome!" I am counting on the dedicated interpreters to give that welcome in the other 25 or so languages. I find that, through them, my Spanish is perfect, my Russian is adequate, and I am a man of many tongues.

Now, you are young, and I am not. I have been where you are, but you have not been where I am. With the encouragement of my wife, I am going to do something I have never done before. That is to speak very openly and directly and personally to you, speak more about myself than ever I have before a congregation.

My wife reminded me that you will be leading families and, of almost as much importance, leading the Church in the years ahead.

A Body Through Which Your Spirit Can Function

When I was five years old I became very ill. It later turned out that I had polio. That was

not diagnosed by the small town doctor. I lay for several weeks on a World War I army cot in our front room beside a coal stove. After those weeks, the doctor said I could get up, having been cured of "pneumonia." I found I could not walk. I remember clearly sliding around on the linoleum floor and pulling myself up on the chairs and learning to walk again.

As I moved on into elementary school and junior high and then into high school, I found that my muscles were very weak. I was very self-conscious. I could not be an athlete.

And it did not help a lot when I read about the man who went to a doctor to see if he could get some help with his inferiority complex. The doctor studied him for a while and said, "You don't have a complex. You *are* inferior!"

With that encouragement, I set about through life and tried to compensate in other ways.

Just as we were about to graduate from high school, World War II opened up. As senior boys, we all lamented that the war would be

Boyd K. Packer was Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 2 February 2003.

over before we were out of high school in June. Little did we know!

My older brother was a pilot, and I thought, “Well, I am going to be drafted. I think I will at least try to enlist in the Air Cadet pilot training program.” To my surprise, I passed the physical. In looking back on that, I can see two reasons for it: one was that they had learned that you did not have to be a well-muscled athlete to fly a plane. The other reason was perhaps more important: they needed tens of thousands of pilots and bombardiers and navigators.

And so, I went to basic training, boot camp, and there the physical training was very rigorous.

I soon found myself in the Air Cadet program where the physical part of it was also very strenuous. So I was back on the army cot, lying at night in agony with aching muscles and swollen limbs and the thought that in the morning we would go right at it again. Actually, that was the best possible therapy.

In that time, I learned to pray. I learned the difference between saying prayers and praying, earnestly praying for health and strength and wisdom.

And then something happened that changed my life entirely in a remarkable way. I had my patriarchal blessing. Usually these are very, very private, and we do not talk about them with others and do not read parts of them to others. But I am going to read a paragraph or two to you tonight, you young people who are with us all over the world.

The patriarch, whom I had never met before, blessed me in this way, in part:

You had the opportunity before coming here to voice your desire to have this privilege of Earth Life in the council of the spirit world. You were valiant in the defense of truth and right. You made a free and willing decision to abide by the laws of Eternal Progress as outlined by our elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ. You kept faithfully your first estate and have been added upon by being born into this world and given a physical body with which you

might experience Earth Life. You have been given a body of such physical proportions and fitness as to enable your spirit to function through it unhampered by physical impediments. You should cherish this as a great heritage. Guard and protect it—take nothing into it that shall harm the organs thereof because it is sacred. It is the instrument of your mind and the foundation of your character. [Patriarchal blessing of Boyd K. Packer, 15 January 1944, 1]

I, all at once, did not care what kind of a body I had. I had a body of sufficient capacity to let my spirit function through it. I had learned that a body is sacred.

I found that it did not matter, really, what kind of bodies we have, so long as we understand that our spirit and our body are combined in such a way that our body becomes an instrument of our mind and the foundation of our character.

From then on, I saw no purpose, nothing to be gained, by talking to other people about my aches and pains. I just moved on through life.

I will read some *very* significant paragraphs by Joseph Smith:

We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. . . .

*All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power. [Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 181]*

Now, let me restate that: The punishment of the adversary was that he did not receive a body. All beings who have bodies, as the Prophet said it, will have power over those who do not. The devil has no power over us, only as we permit him.

That was a great moment of enlightenment when I read in my patriarchal blessing. And then, as I began to study and learn, there came the knowledge and understanding of who we are and where we came from.

I was in the military—had not been on a mission, had not had any college, and often was alone. We often are alone, all of us, in our lives. I became a product of the Book of Mormon.

I have here a small, serviceman's copy of the Book of Mormon. It is bound in leather, real leather. I picked up an old leather pilot's flight jacket in the wreckage of our headquarters on the little island of Ie Shima in the Ryukyu Islands. It was wet, and the building was torn all to pieces. Everything on the island was destroyed by a hurricane. I rescued the old leather pilot's jacket from the wreckage. The cover of my Book of Mormon was getting very torn, so I gave it a leather cover, genuine leather. I sewed it on myself. The bindings I took from the strings of a parachute that likewise had been ruined.

I do not know whether it has any meaning, but there was one other thing I picked up in that wreckage of the orderly room: a dictionary. I found out you cannot find anything unless you know how to spell it before you look! That became part of my education.

Knowledge of Right and Wrong

From the Book of Mormon I learned something else that is very important. Moroni taught:

For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; [The Spirit of Christ or Light of Christ is given to every man. I will comment on that in a moment.] wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. [Moroni 7:16]

I had already read, when I came to that, the statement of Nephi in 2 Nephi that all “men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil” (2 Nephi 2:5).

So that is built into us. We know what is right and what is wrong. We all know. That is a very important thing to understand. As we move through life, we begin to understand some other things.

We live in very troubled times—the beginning of even more troubled times. I want to speak to you very openly. What we faced in World War II, the jeopardy and challenge, was nothing compared to what you young people face now. It is a terrible and challenging time and, at once, perhaps the best time ever in the history of mankind to be alive.

I want to make this point: In the premortal existence, we were given spirit bodies, and we were given agency. So we are free. Let me read verses from the 93rd section of the Doctrine and Covenants:

And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments.

He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things.

Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.

All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself. [D&C 93:27–30]

So there we are. We have agency. What happens in our lives and in our pattern of eternal progression is just what we decide it will be.

All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence.

Behold, here is the agency of man. [D&C 93:30–31]

The Great Plan of Redemption and the Word of Wisdom

As we learn about ourselves and learn about the great plan of redemption, we know that in the premortal existence intelligence existed forever. It was not created. It will exist forever. In due course, we were given a spirit body (see Acts 17:29; D&C 93:33–35; Abraham 3:22–23; 5:7). We became then the sons and daughters of God. We had gender then. We were male or female (see Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6; D&C 20:17–18; 132:63; Moses 2:27; 6:9; Abraham 4:27). While in that existence, we were valiant and chose good, as Alma recorded (see Alma 13:3).

Alma said that “God gave unto them commandments, *after* having made known unto them the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:32; emphasis added).

The great plan is called the great plan of redemption and six or seven other titles (see 2 Nephi 11:5; Alma 12:25; 17:16; 34:9; 41:2; 42:5, 11–13, 15, 31; D&C 101:22; Moses 6:62). Alma called it “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8).

Then, in the course of our having chosen good (and that was mentioned in my patriarchal blessing), we had a body prepared by mortal parents, and we were born into mortality. With that came the power to create life, to follow the plan of redemption, the plan of happiness. How we employ that power and understand the supernal value of it is one major factor that will determine where we go in life.

That paragraph was a revelation to me. The patriarch, who is a prophet, said, “Take nothing into [the body that would] harm the organs thereof.”

As I began to read, I came to section 89 and learned that it was “a Word of Wisdom, . . . given for a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints” (D&C 89:1, 3). And “the weakest of all saints” included me.

There was another essential point. The Lord said, “I warn you, and forewarn you.”

“In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation” (D&C 89:4).

The scriptures say elsewhere that “this is a day of warning, and not a day of many words” (D&C 63:58).

In one way, I envy you with your youth and looking forward to all the opportunities and challenges. In another way, I’m glad I’m old! It is more comfortable.

The “Word of Wisdom [was] given for a principle with promise” (D&C 89:1, 3). But what is the promise? The promise, of course, is personal revelation.

[Those who remember to do these things will] *receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones; . . .*

And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint. [And that means we will have some measure of health, which, I have learned, is of secondary importance.]

And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them.
[D&C 89:18, 20–21]

And this: “[You shall receive] great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures” (D&C 89:19).

Now, the Word of Wisdom is, I think, only incidentally to keep us healthy, if we will observe it. But that matter of physical health is a losing battle. You know, no matter what you do to take care of your body, in due course, it begins to weaken! We are not going to live forever in this life. We can live with our infirmities.

I remember once we were having a sacrament meeting in the temple. Elder Marion D. Hanks was passing the sacrament. I had a catch in my shoulder, and I could not get my hand

up to the bread plate. It was very awkward. I was very embarrassed. Finally, we accomplished it, and later I apologized to him and said, "I just couldn't; my shoulder just wouldn't move!"

And he said, "My shoulder wouldn't move, either! I couldn't get the thing down to you!" So that was some comfort.

We have accepted as the Word of Wisdom in the Church standards that we will not change. You are not going to go on a mission unless you observe it. You are not going to go to the temple for the more sacred ordinances unless you observe it. That is no tea or coffee or liquor or tobacco or whatever else is covered by it.

We get strange letters asking if this or that is a part of the Word of Wisdom. Marijuana is not listed in section 89! And neither is strychnine or arsenic listed! But, of course, they are not habit-forming.

The point is, if you want to move on spiritually and do as you ought to do in this life, the principle outlined in the Word of Wisdom shows you the requirements. You cannot just toy with it.

Just a week or two ago before a seminary class began, some students were standing at the back of the room. It was a Monday. A new girl in the class overheard them. These very foolish young people were talking about their weekend and what drinks they had. One of them turned to her and said, "What is your favorite drink?"

She said, "Water, Stupid!"

And so, like it or not! If you are tampering, if there is any mischief, you have got to quit it! It is not that you are going to be a healthy athlete all of your life, and it is not that you are going to avoid old age. It is that you *will* have the key to revelation. When your body begins to deteriorate, the patterns of revelation will be augmented and magnified.

Two Conflicting Influences

It is another thing to know that the Holy Ghost is conferred upon us at the time of baptism. Remember, "first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Articles of Faith 1:4).

In the Book of Mormon again:

Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ [as Nephi said]. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do. [2 Nephi 32:3]

Now, you in your youth are being prompted. If you will keep your body in a worthy, receptive circumstance, you will be prompted, even have angels attend you. Angels will attend you and will "speak [to you] by the power of the Holy Ghost."

But you also should know, as Moroni said, "[The devil] persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him" (Moroni 7:17).

So you are the focus of two conflicting patterns trying to influence you in your life, trying to have you go this way or that way (see Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13; James 1:8). You are the one who makes the decision.

As the old man a generation ago said, "The Lord's votin' for me, and the devil's votin' against me, but it's *my* vote that counts!" And that is good, solid doctrine.

You will have just what you want. On one hand, you have inspiration from the Holy Ghost, and, on the other hand, you have what President Ezra Taft Benson called "sinspiration" from the angels of the devil. They are with you all of the time.

I gave a talk once in which I likened the mind to a stage. There is always something going on in that stage. Whatever you think is

going on in the stage, these ideas and promptings and temptations will move in from the side. What do you do about it? You ought to have a delete key.

I know a little about computers because my grandchildren have taught me. I know that every computer keyboard has a delete key. If there is something there you do not want, something you did that you want to get rid of, you underline it and delete it.

You can have a delete key in your mind. Your mind is in charge, and your body is the instrument of your mind. Now you will have to figure out a delete key for yourself.

One man showed me once that he used his wedding ring. He said that whenever there was an unworthy thought that tried to get into his mind—and those influences are everywhere—he just rubbed his thumb against his wedding ring. That was the delete key, “Get out of my mind! I am in charge!”

You are in command. You cannot say that you do not know any better. You do know better!

There are other ways. Music is powerful. My older brother taught me that.

When he was flying in the Eighth Air Force, it was terrible. He was shot down twice. But he said finally he got so he was not afraid. He was not afraid because when fear came, he turned on this little orchestra in his mind. He took his favorite hymn and played it over and over in his mind.

I learned something, and I have since lived that way. When some ugly thought from the nether kingdom tries to get into my mind, I move it out with good music, hymns (see D&C 25:12).

That is one of the reasons why you are very, very, very, very, very, very foolish when you like to participate in music that is dark and noisy. Worthy inspiration cannot get through to you where you are. No matter how popular it may be or how much you want to belong, just remember that there are those angels of the devil using you.

Remember the incident when Christ crossed the water and came to a cave where there were two wild men possessed of the devils. Those spirits said to Him, “What have we to do with [you]?” (Matthew 8:29). They knew what was going to happen.

They begged, “If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine” (Matthew 8:31). There was a herd of swine feeding there. They would rather go there. They did not have a body, could not get a body, would not ever have a body, and they were temporarily in possession of the bodies of those poor men. Christ did that. Then it records that the swine ran away into the sea and were drowned. (See Matthew 8:28–32.)

Learn from the scriptures. They are teaching you—teaching about everyday life.

Marriage and the Sacred Powers of Creation

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve issued a proclamation on the family. I can tell you how that came about. They had a world conference on the family sponsored by the United Nations in Beijing, China. We sent representatives. It was not pleasant what they heard. They called another one in Cairo. Some of our people were there. I read the proceedings of that. The word *marriage* was not mentioned. It was at a conference on the family, but marriage was not even mentioned.

It was then they announced that they were going to have such a conference here in Salt Lake City. Some of us made the recommendation: “They are coming here. We had better proclaim our position.”

You read the proclamation on the family. Read it carefully. I will read the first paragraph:

We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children. [“The Family:

A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102]

Here the physical body comes into play. Within us is the sacred power of creation. The adversary is busy with all his angels focusing right to the bull's-eye of what would destroy us quickest.

There is the matter of pornography. It has become almost a pornographic world. Now, you leave it alone! If you have any, destroy it! And if you know somebody that has it, help them destroy it! And do not look at it, not ever! It is destructive, and it will take you on a path that is not consistent with who you are and what you can decide. Do not watch it, not ever!

To talk in something less than casual terms, do not ever let anybody touch your body in order to stimulate in any way those sacred powers of creation. Nobody! Not of your same gender or any gender! That power is to be expressed only and solely with your husband or wife to whom you are legally and lawfully married (see D&C 42:22). Then all of the happiness possible is open to you. You must guard that sacred power with your life.

If you young women are going with a young man who wants to take you to places where you should not go, however appealing, to those dark and noisy places, and there is some move to try to get you to do something you know you should not do, cut it off. Break it up! Send him a letter. Stamp it "Second-Class Male."

It is just that serious. No pornography! No mischief! You save those creative powers until they are used for the purpose for which they were intended and that to create a family.

There are natural instincts, and they are very strong; they have to be. And they are good! There are also cravings and temptations. There can be habitual self-stimulation and a lot of things that are just unworthy of you.

The young men are not the only ones. We are finding now that the young women,

unaccustomed in times past, are becoming aggressive. You young men guard yourselves. You just let it be known that you have ahead of you the fulfillment of the blessings that come with the great plan of happiness. There is not a man that I know that cannot send a woman who has those designs away with just a look or a gesture and just *No!* And the same with those young women to those young men.

You may feel alone. A lot of times you are alone. But that is part of what life is.

Understanding the Plan of Redemption

People write asking what is the position of the Church on the Word of Wisdom, for instance, on soft drinks or something. And we think, "Why do they have to ask?" It is a principle, and you have the freedom to do as you will. You do not have to be commanded in all things. Without having to have the Church deliver a statement on it, you should know what the Lord's position is on abortion or cloning or same-gender marriage or birth control. All of those things are built in as a part of what we know and what we are.

We are about the only ones left in the world who hold to these standards. When we look around, we cannot find any organization that is holding to the standards. We do not like to talk about the other churches, but we are going to stand alone. If so, there we will stand.

There are many things that cannot be understood or taught or explained unless it is in terms of the plan of redemption. Unless you understand the basic plan—the premortal existence, the purpose of life, the Fall, the Atonement, the Resurrection—unless you understand that, the unmarried, the abused, the handicapped, the abandoned, the addicted, the disappointed, those with gender disorientation, or the intellectuals will find no enduring comfort. You will not think life is fair unless you know the plan of redemption.

Some say they are born with some tendency. Whether you are born with them or you acquired them or you got them through over-medication, addiction, or any other way, what should you do? Resist them! You resist them and push them away. How long? As long as you live. There are some things that are a lifelong battle.

An Unfinished Composition

Finally, two things: Ten years ago I was in England on my sixty-eighth birthday. I was having a little difficulty. I could not easily put on a coat. To comb my hair, I kind of had to bend down and did not do it very well at that. I wrote a few lines which I have since entitled “Unfinished Composition.” This is not going to impress your English professors.

Unfinished Composition

Part I 1992—Written in England

*I had a thought the other night;
A thought profound and deep.
It came when I was too worn down,
Too tired to go to sleep.*

*I'd had a very busy day
And pondered on my fate.
The thought was this:
When I was young, I wasn't sixty-eight!*

*I could walk without a limp;
I had no shoulder pain.
I could read a line through twice
And quote it back again.*

*I could work for endless hours
And hardly stop to breathe.
And things that now I cannot do
I mastered then with ease.*

*If I could now turn back the years,
If that were mine to choose,
I would not barter age for youth,
I have too much to lose.*

*I am quite content to move ahead;
To yield my youth, however grand.
The thing I'd lose if I went back
Is what I understand.*

Now a few months ago, ten years later, I added Part II of this “Unfinished Composition.”

Part II 2002

*Ten years have flown to who knows where
And with them much of pain.
A metal hip erased my limp;
I walk quite straight again.*

*Another plate holds neck bones fast—
A wonderful creation!
It backed my polio away;
I've joined the stiff-necked generation.*

*The signs of aging can be seen,
Those things will not get better.
The only thing that grows in strength
With me is my forgetter.*

*You ask, Do I remember you?
Of course, you're much the same.
Now don't go getting all upset—
I don't recall your name.*

*I would agree I've learned some things
I did not want to know,
But age has brought those precious truths
That make the Spirit grow.*

*Of all the blessings that have come,
The best thing in my life
Is the comfort and encouragement
I get from my dear wife.*

*Our children all have married well,
With families of their own.
With children and grandchildren,
How soon they all have grown.*

I have not changed my mind one bit

*About regaining youth.
We're meant to age, for with it
Comes a knowledge of the truth.*

*You ask, What will the future bring?
Just what will be my fate?
We'll go along and not complain.
Ask when I'm eighty-eight!*

Part III—To be continued

A Broken Bird

Now, the last thing I want to talk to you about: a broken bird.

Over the years, as a diversion, I have carved wooden birds. Sometimes it would take a year to complete one. I would get specimens and measure the feathers and study the colors and then carve them. I would carve a setting for them. It was very restful. Sometimes when I would get unsettled, my wife would say, "Why don't you go carve a bird!" It was a very calming thing in my life.

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle and I were going into town one day. I had one of the carvings. I was taking it in to show someone. We had put it on the backseat. At an intersection, he slammed on the brakes, and the carving tipped upside down on the floor and broke to pieces. He pulled over to the side and looked at it. He was devastated. I was not.

Without thinking, I said, "Forget it. I made it. I can fix it." And I did. I made it stronger than it was. I improved it a bit.

Now, who made you? Who is your Creator? There is not anything about your life that gets bent or broken that He cannot fix and will fix. You have to decide. If some of you have made mistakes and you think you are broken and cannot be put together, you do not know the doctrine of the Church. You do not know what the Atonement was about and who the Lord is and what a power He is in your life.

This is His Church. We are His servants. We who hold the priesthood have His authority and power. We can perform miracles. We do not talk about them. Most of those miracles have to do with healing the body. The greater miracles are the miracles of spiritual growth and healing in the lives of every one of us.

So if you are on the wrong path, then you must decide. You have the agency. You have the promptings of the Holy Ghost to guide you. There is that great truth that the gospel is a gospel of repentance. Repentance is like a mathematical equation. Repentance leads to forgiveness.

A Marvelous Time to Be Alive

You young people, move ahead in your lives. It is a marvelous time to be alive. The world is not going to come to an end. You are going to have time to stand, as I stand now, talking about your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren. You decide!

You were born as spirit children of God in the premortal existence. You were born to earthly parents in this life. "The spirit and the body [eternally combined, the Lord said,] receive a fulness of joy" (see D&C 138:17; see also D&C 93:33–34). "And the spirit and the body [combined] are the soul of man" (D&C 88:15).

You are consummately precious to the Lord, to the Church, to your parents, to one another. You now must decide what is right—you know what is right—and then have the courage to do it. You will be blessed and redeemed and exalted.

As a servant of the Lord, I invoke His blessings upon you, you consummately precious young people, that you will be protected, that you will learn how to hold the powers of the adversary in abeyance simply because you command it (see James 4:7), and that he has no place with you. On the other hand, you learn to invite the Spirit of Revelation that will be constantly with you. The Holy Ghost will be your constant companion and "teach you all things" (John 14:26).

May you be blessed, and your parents who have sent you here. And may you look forward to a marvelous life in the greatest work that has ever been on the face of this earth.

I bear witness that Jesus is the Christ. He lives. We know Him. He directs this Church. The gospel is true. The plan is a great plan of happiness. With all that we should *want* to do, we are, in one way, *compelled* to do by commandment of the Almighty. I bear that witness and invoke that blessing upon you as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.