

# *The Heritage of Our Summer Holidays*

L. TOM PERRY

**I**t is always a humbling experience to come to this vast congregation and speak to you. Especially is this true this particular time. For the last two weeks I've been on the ranch in Wyoming. You could put that whole city in this center section here—that is, if you don't count the mosquitos and the cows.

We're delighted to be with you at this important time in BYU's history. I always enjoy the summer, and this summer is significant here at this university. The summer of 1980 marks the end of another great era of administration at BYU. I want the students and the staff to know of my admiration for President Dallin Oaks. He is a man of tremendous talent and ability. His talents are so wide and varied that they must be given opportunity to be expressed in other settings, for he will make contributions in many areas during his life. He has lifted this university to new and important heights; now he will render the same kind of service in his other professional pursuits. I will miss him at the functions here at the school, especially at the ball games. As long as President Oaks was in attendance, I felt uninhibited in my enthusiasm. He always displayed such a spirit and interest in the game that I could follow along without feeling out of place as long as he was by my side.

I was delighted when the name of Jeffrey Holland was presented to the Council to replace President Oaks. I have admired him for a great many years. He served as a counselor in the Hartford, Connecticut stake when I was a counselor in the Boston stake. Of course, we were in the same region, so I had an opportunity to become acquainted with him in those early days. I have watched with great interest his many accomplishments since that time. He has a special spirit about him. He touches and penetrates lives like few men I have ever been around. How blessed you are to have this new president. It's a difficult challenge to follow President Oaks, but I know of no one on earth I would rather see succeed him than President Holland. How blessed this university is to be touched with the lives of these two great men. Enjoy President Holland. I'm sure you will as this inspired leader assumes his position and takes BYU to even greater heights under his administration.

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President Oaks has left a great heritage at this university, and it is heritage I'd like to talk to you about tonight. It is important to me and important to you that we understand the blessings we have received as members of our Father in Heaven's kingdom. The Book of Mormon begins with the story of a group of people who are required to understand their heritage. It begins this way, in the second chapter of 1 Nephi:

*For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life. [Now that would surely get Lehi's attention, wouldn't it?]*

[He listened to the instructions of the Lord, and these were the instructions:] *And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.*

*And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded him.*

*And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness. And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness. [1 Ne. 2:1-4]*

What a challenging assignment for that family. I've often wondered what would happen in my family if I awakened one morning and said, "Barbara, Lee, Gay, go to the garage and get your sleeping bags and the tents. We're going to leave our home and never return again. Now don't worry about all those things you have on your shelves in your bedroom, those precious things you've been accumulating. We won't be able to carry those, just a few provisions, and we're going to follow the direction

of the Lord and never return to this place again." I can imagine what would have happened. Gay would call Dr. Nelson right away to find out what had happened to her father. You see, this was a great challenge to this family.

Now they had only gone a short distance when the Lord again spoke to Lehi in a dream. And Lehi then said to his sons:

*Behold I have dreamed a dream, in the which the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brethren shall return to Jerusalem.*

*For behold, Laban hath the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of thy forefathers, and they are engraven upon plates of brass.*

*Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brothers should go unto the house of Laban, and seek the records, and bring them down hither into the wilderness. [1 Ne. 3:2-4]*

You see, before they could start on this journey they had to have the history of their family so that they could preserve their heritage and remember the Lord's dealings with them. Repeated attempts were made to obtain the record. Finally, Laban was delivered into the hands of Nephi and he was able to obtain it. Then he was taught a great lesson. The Lord said to Nephi after he had slain Laban that "it is better that one man should perish than that a whole nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief" (1 Ne. 4:13). You see, without that heritage, without that history, without that law of the Lord with them, there was really no hope that they would progress in the ways of the Lord. The scripture goes on to say:

*And now, when I, Nephi, had heard these words, I remembered the words of the Lord which he spake unto me in the wilderness, saying that: Inasmuch as thy seed shall keep my commandments, they shall prosper in the land of promise.*

*Yea, and I also thought that they could not keep the commandments of the Lord according to the law of Moses, save they should have the law.*

*And I also knew that the law was engraven upon the plates of brass. [1 Ne. 4:14–16]*

It was essential that this history of God's dealings with the children of man be carried into the wilderness for this family to grow and progress and stay close to the Lord. It is fundamental that we have the scriptures, the history of our progenitors, as we sojourn through life. If that was true for Lehi's family, it is true for each of us. We must have that history.

At the center of each summer are three special holidays that remind us of the blessings of our heritage. Of course, the first is the Fourth of July. This has always been a special day to me. It is only natural because I grew up in a home where our parents loved this great country. My father had been a history teacher and he loved American history. It became my favorite subject in school. One of the highlights, when we were children, of the Fourth of July was our annual family ceremony of taking five flags out of a special box we placed them in every year and attaching them to the ornament of our old car. Then we would have our own private family parade consisting of a drive down the main street watching those five flags wave in front of us. The Fourth of July every year was a time of anticipation and then celebration.

When I was a small child, the American dream was to drive behind those five flags and give honor and respect to them. As I have grown older, I have developed a great patriotic love for the blessings of possessing citizenship in this great land of opportunity. One author has written this about the dream of America:

*There was, there is, an American dream. A dozen honest, perceptive observers all would sketch it differently—but why not? It is variegated, characterized by strong themes and subtle contradictions—things of the mind and things of the heart.*

*Continuity and evolution, a sense of place, symbols, a history of sacred memories. Furthermore, it is alive—a living thing. And living things change. At the same time, with every decade that passes, the dream is given texture by an ever deepening sense of our land and our past. Compared with Europeans, Americans were irreverent towards tradition. Yet slowly, deeper than words, the images, symbols, and memories accumulated—Valley Forge, the frontier, the wide Missouri, the Gold Rush, the Pioneer journeys west, Civil War battlefields, the face of Lincoln, sod houses on the prairie, the Little Big Horn, Ellis Island, immigrant neighborhoods, the great American Expeditionary forces, the Model-T, bread lines, Pearl Harbor, the affluent society, . . . Vietnam, good memories and heart-breaking memories, growth and tragedy, lessons learned and lessons still to learn.*

*All of our history since then has been one, long instruction in the difficulties of the dream. We know now all too well that our Founding Fathers didn't hand us a completed task. They handed us a beginning. We have had to work, we still have to work very hard to make real the ideals of the founding fundamental documents.*

*There have been some enormous changes in America since the beginning. No doubt there will be great changes ahead in patterns of work, political and economic arrangements, the shape of institutions. The American reality will never be static. Nor will the dream. As in all things in the realm of values, it will be received with each generation by caring men and women to guide them, and they in turn will keep it alive by reshaping it to meet the unrolling future. [John Gardner, *Two Hundred Years of Work in America* (1976), p. 74]*

Our prophets have spoken fondly of this great country. One of the quotations I enjoy reading over and over again is that of John Taylor. He said:

*A great destiny lies before the United States. The question is, is she competent for the task? She has outridden the fiery test of revolution, hurled*

*defiance at a despot's power, and grasped the sceptre of liberty with a nervous, powerful grip. She has, out of the chaotic, confused masses of material associated with corrupt governments, organized a system of government and framed a constitution that while it is honorable to its founders, guarantees to all, to the fullest extent, [liberty]. . . . Liberty here is more than a name Here man is free to speak, free to think, free to write, free to act, free to do good. The very genius of our constitution and institutions is freedom. If there is a fault, it is the fault of party, sectional strife, or narrow bigotry; it is not in our institutions. [Gospel Kingdom (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), p. 312]*

So wrote John Taylor as he looked at this great country.

There have even been declarations about America from those of other lands. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote this:

*I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there; in her fertile fields and boundless prairies, and it was not there; in her rich mines and in her vast world commerce, and it was not there. Not until I went to the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because she is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great. [Prophets, Principles and National Survival, Jerald L. Newquist, comp. (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1969), p. 60]*

Life has been good to me. I was privileged to be born in this great and noble land and share in this heritage. With that blessing, of course, comes responsibility—a responsibility to serve her when called, a responsibility to defend her when she is threatened, a responsibility to be informed when I go to the polls to vote for her leadership, a responsibility to contribute to her wellbeing.

This summer I find myself concerned about the problems we have allowed to come upon her because of our complacency and our greed. We have become lazy and uninformed. We have become complainers rather than contributors. And I wonder if it is not time for us to awaken in ourselves a greater sense of responsibility for this land of the free. I wonder if what we need is not another Moroni. When he learned of the great dissension and wickedness among his people, he stirred them up. How did he do it? “He rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children— and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.” Then he put on his armor set to do battle—

*his head-plate, his breastplate, and his shield, and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should a band of Christians remain to possess the land . . .*

*And when Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had written upon the rent part, and crying with a loud voice, saying:*

*Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let him come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them. [Alma 46:12, 13, 19–20]*

Yes, the Title of Liberty—in memory of their God, their religion, their freedom, their peace, their wives, and their children. I wonder if it would be too much to ask that we have the courage of a Moroni and be willing to rend our garment and write upon it and let the people of this great land know of our feeling for its freedom, and make sacrifices to give our country the spirit and the leadership it deserves.

Now, of course, the second event that occurs in these summer holidays is the Twenty-fourth of July. I've always been excited with pioneer stories. My grandmother lived next door to us when I was a child. At the age of eight she had walked most of the way across the plains. She could remember enough stories to keep me fascinated by the hour as I would sit and listen to her tell about pioneer experiences.

Brigham Young has always been one of my special heroes. His answers to problems were basic and fundamental and benefited the people. I marvel at his spirit and enthusiasm as he led the Saints west.

When it became apparent that the cost of moving the new converts from Europe to Utah would be prohibitive, the idea was presented to President Young that they use handcarts to cross the prairies. President Young could immediately see the advantage, not only in the cost savings but also in the physical benefit it would be to the people to walk that far and arrive in the Salt Lake Valley full of vigor and vitality after such an experience. He said this:

*We are sanguine that such a train will out-travel any ox train that can be started. They should have a few good cows to furnish milk, and a few beef cattle to drive and to butcher as they may need. In this way the expense, risk, loss and perplexity of teams will be obviated, and the saints will more effectually escape the scenes of distress, anguish and death which have often laid so many of our brethren and sisters in the dust.*

*We propose sending men of faith and experience with suitable instructions, to some proper outfitting point to carry into effect the above suggestions; let the saints, therefore, who intend to immigrate the ensuing year, understand that they are expected to walk and draw their luggage across the plains, and that they will be assisted by the fund in no other way. [B. H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Church Deseret News Press, 1930), v. 4, p. 85]*

Between 1856 and 1860 a few thousand Saints successfully made the 1300-mile journey by handcart. The success of their travel was only marred by two fateful trips, the Willie and Martin handcart companies, who left much too late in the year to avoid the early winter snows. Again, notice the genius of this great leader. It was just before the beginning of October conference of that year when word reached President Young of the difficulties of these two companies. So, he devoted the entire conference to organizing the relief effort to go out and assist those distressed Saints. And he instructed the brethren not to wait a week or a month before they went. He wanted the four-horse teams ready the following Monday to go and relieve the suffering of the Saints caught in the snows. And that's exactly what happened. The first relief parties were on their way that following Monday. The description of the Willie company's joy upon receiving that first relief party brings emotions close to the surface. Captain Willie had left his small band and gone out with a single companion in search of the relief train. Then, history records,

*On the evening of the third day after Captain Willie's departure, just as the sun was sinking beautifully behind the distant hills, on an eminence, immediately west of our camp, several covered wagons, each drawn by four horses, were seen coming towards us. The news ran through the camp like wildfire, and all who were able to leave their beds turned out en masse to see them. A few minutes brought them sufficiently near to reveal our faithful captain slightly in advance of the train. Shouts of joy rent the air; strong men wept until tears ran freely down their furrowed and sunburnt cheeks, and little children partook of the joy which some of them hardly understood, and fairly danced around with gladness. Restraint was set aside in the general rejoicing, and as the brethren entered [the] camp the sisters fell upon them and deluged them with kisses. The brethren were so overcome that they could not*

*for some time utter a word, but in choking silence repressed all demonstrations of . . . emotions. . . . Soon however, feeling was somewhat abated, and such shaking of hands, such words of welcome, and such invocation of God's blessing have seldom been witnessed!* [Comprehensive History of the Church, v. 4, pp. 93–94]

Out of that hardy pioneer stock have developed traditions and a heritage which have built strong families that have contributed so much to the Intermountain West and the rest of the world.

I was invited to a luncheon a little over a week ago sponsored by a retail firm that was announcing the opening of four stores in the Salt Lake area. As I sat at the table with the president, I asked him, having had retail experience, how he was brave enough to open four stores all at the same time in a brand new market area. His reply was just about what I expected. He said they had made a demographic study of all the major metropolitan areas in the United States. They were interested in finding out which of these areas offered the greatest potential for a department store appealing to young families. The Salt Lake area ranked first in the nation. They also found as a result of their study that the work force there is noted to be honest and industrious. You see, a pioneer heritage is still evident down to the third and fourth generations in this area.

However, I was shocked by a statistic that crossed my desk a few weeks ago. It stated that only thirteen percent of the children being reared in our country today come from traditional homes consisting of a working father, a stay-at-home mother, and one or more children. Each day we see the effects of the breakup of the traditional home. There is an alarming increase in the number of battered wives, physically and sexually abused children, vandalism in schools, teenage crime rates, pregnancies among unmarried teenagers,

and elderly people growing old without the solace of an extended family.

Our present prophet has warned us that the home is the place to save society. A proper home, of course, is not created automatically when a boy and girl fall in love and marry. It takes those same virtues that were taught in pioneer homes—faith, courage, discipline, and dedication—to make the success of a marriage. But just as those pioneers made a desert blossom as a rose, so it will happen in our lives and in our homes if we follow their traditions and follow the great heritage that they establish in these valleys of the mountains. Yes, a pioneer faith is needed as much in the world today as in any period of time. Once again, we need to know that heritage. We need to teach it; we need to be proud of it; we need to preserve it.

The third in this triad of holidays is the fifth of August. That date probably doesn't mean much to the rest of you, but it does to me. You see, that is my birthday. Now, birthdays were great events in our family. It was our special time each year. The whole family would try to make this day a day to remember. The choice of food, activities, and radio programs on that day always went to the birthday child, and parents made a special effort to show their love and appreciation to him. This attention was a way of showing us that we were wanted and needed and had the complete love and support of our family.

As the excitement of childhood birthdays has faded into the past, I have changed my method of celebration. My study of the gospel has greatly magnified my appreciation for the gift of life. I understand better each day the blessings of knowing that I am a child of God.

What tremendous power and potential the Lord has blessed each of his children with. I was reading an article in a news magazine on an airplane a short time ago. In it the storage capacity of the human brain was compared with that of the latest computer storage units. The measurements were all in millions of

characters of storage. It said that the floppy disk could store 2.5 million characters, the magnetic disc 313 million, the optical disk memory 12,500,000 million, the IBM 3850 magnetic cartridge 250 million million. The human brain, though, can store 125 billion million characters. Think of that. Think of the power of a child of our Father in Heaven.

Birthdays have become, for me, a time of personal evaluation. Now I look at the five areas of my life each year on my birthday, and I analyze my growth and development and have a time of personal challenge and interview.

First, I look at my physical body. At the time of my birthday each year I submit myself to my annual physical examination, and I keep a record of the results and set targets for achievement each year. Vital signs such as weight, heart rate, and blood pressure are all evaluated. This is also the time when I establish my exercise program for the coming year to keep myself physically in shape.

Fortunately, I have improved since my experience with one of your good stake presidents. I came to his stake one day, and as we got involved in a conversation about his stake I noticed that he was quite nervous. I said, "What's the matter, President?" He said, "This is my first conference with a General Authority." But he quickly recovered. He soon had me down on the floor teaching me how to do sit-ups, and he saved himself from all of the questions I was going to ask him by keeping me working on sit-ups until I was so out of breath I could hardly speak. As you can see, it is important that we evaluate our physical progress and keep our bodies strong and able.

Secondly, there is mental development. I evaluate my performance in improving my mind. Have I kept pace with the program I established a year ago for my scripture study? Have I gained greater understanding and capacity in my professional field? Just because I'm a General Authority doesn't mean I want to lose the experience I have had in business, so I

try to keep abreast of the latest developments in that field. Have I kept up with current events in my community and my state and in the world? Have I developed a better understanding of the cultural arts that the Lord has blessed us so abundantly with? Each of these I evaluate to see how well I have performed during the last year.

The third area is financial. Each year I take time to prepare a personal balance sheet and compare it with last year's; I make an operating statement and compare it with my financial objectives. And I ask myself: Have I given a fair return on the great blessings the Lord has given me? Is my performance up to an acceptable standard? Have I stayed out of debt? Am I preparing to be free of encumbrances as the Lord has required of us? It is very important to have a financial plan.

Fourth, social. How am I progressing in my "people skills." Am I improving my ability to communicate both in speaking and writing? Have I improved my listening skills? And—this one is always difficult for me—have I become more patient? (I try to let my wife evaluate me on this, and my ratings haven't been very high.) Have I improved in my ability to control my temper and to be in control of myself all the time?

Then, finally, I sit down and give myself a personal priesthood interview. I check myself to see if I am worthy of the temple recommend I carry. I ask myself: Have I improved in my ability to communicate with my Eternal Father? Am I faithful in my prayers? Have I shared the gospel with a friend or neighbor? (This is a responsibility we all have.) Have I completed the temple work commitment I established at the first of the year? Is my personal journal up to date? Am I recording a history so my family will know of the experiences I have had?

The fifth of August is a special day for me—a day to check on my personal progress toward

completing the requirements that will yield eternal life.

Each summer we have the opportunity of participating in two events, and for some of us three, that reminds us of the Lord's blessings to us. Each summer I renew my vision of the American dream and my determination to make a contribution to our great country. I remember our pioneer heritage and commit myself to preserving the faith, the courage, and the industry of this great people who made a desert blossom as a rose. And finally, I remember that I am a child of God, with all of the potential power, talent, and eternal opportunities that this heritage provides me.

How blessed we are. What responsibilities our knowledge and our understanding carry.

Arnold Palmer, the great golfer, once said, "Winning isn't everything, but wanting to is." What a great statement—"Wanting to is." God grant us the desire to want to win the greatest of all the gifts he has given his children—the gift of life eternal. May God bless us that we will understand our potential, that we will learn and grow and develop an understanding of our heritage and determine to preserve those great gifts that have been given to us as his children. I bear you my solemn witness tonight that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that it is his way that will lead us to life eternal. May God bless us with the courage to follow that leadership, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.