

“Choose You This Day Whom Ye Will Serve”

L. TOM PERRY

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. [Joshua 24:15]

We’ve gathered tonight in a fireside. A fireside to me is a gathering around the hearth in an informal setting. Of course, that’s difficult to stage with the numbers here in the Marriott Center. But still, I think a fireside should be less formal, not so preachy, and have, perhaps, more of an interchange between the one selected to speak and those in attendance.

I would like to try to make this more informal tonight, and see if I can respond to your needs. Therefore, I requested that the president of the BYU Seventh Stake, the host stake for tonight, select several students to participate with me. They held two panel discussions, one with the brethren and one with the sisters, to elicit issues that some of you may also be wrestling with. They prepared a long list of possible subjects for discussion tonight. The list was sent to me. I selected five for discussion in this setting. The persons who submitted the questions selected have been requested to participate here with me tonight. They will

come forward and ask me their question, and I will attempt to answer it.

The purpose of this approach is to draw closer to you and your needs. However, I freely admit that I have had the questions beforehand, and have prepared a response. With such a distinguished and talented group as attends Brigham Young University, I would not want to be embarrassed by questions that I could not answer.

What Is Most Important?

Let’s have question number one. What is your name, young lady?

“Terry Warren. “

Would you like to ask me the question?

“What is most important for me now—school, work, dating, church callings, parents, or room-mates? How can I effectively deal with the pressures of these various responsibilities?”

Well, Terry, let’s look in the scriptures. Could you turn to Ecclesiastes and read the first part of chapter 3 for me?

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To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.
[Ecclesiastes 3:1–2]

From the scriptures it seems that in setting our priorities there must be a time to rejoice, to have the proper, positive attitude about the things we are required to do, and not get ourselves burdened down with the pressures of life.

Second, there must be a time to do good, to be of service, to not think of only ourselves, or be selfish in that which we seek to accomplish. We should be willing to share our time and our talents with others.

Now, Terry, I don't want to shock you, but this is not the most difficult time of your life for making decisions on how to use your time, although it may seem so. In fact, I predict that from here on through your schooling and throughout your life, you will always be facing the problem of how to use your time to the best advantage, while feeling pushed sometimes to the limit.

There will always be those pressures about spending more time at home and doing the things that are required there to keep it in order and a haven of peace and rest, a place of training, of understanding, and of growing.

There will always be the pressures of your profession with never enough time to do everything you would like to do. There will be church callings, community service, compassionate service, and all the rest of the responsibilities that will add burdens and great opportunities to your life.

Could I counsel you in just two areas? First, in time management. I know of no successful managers of time who do not have a specific plan of how they should use the period of life the Lord has given to them. It is essential that you periodically list the major categories involved in your good use of time—your

classes, your studies, your church assignments, recreation, meditation, etc. Then carefully calendar a portion of each day or week to satisfy your needs. Attempt to keep your life in balance.

Then, after the actual performance is over, evaluate and see how successful you were in utilizing your time. Actual performance will form the base for the next planning period. You ought to learn how to use your time while you are in school. It could be one of the major contributions you can make to your life. The second is managing the financial resources our Father in Heaven has blessed you with. Schooling is becoming more expensive each year. I know many of you are laboring under great pressures in order to complete your education. There is always the temptation to borrow to relieve that burden. Sometimes that may be necessary.

I learned a great lesson early in my business career. I was called into my boss's office one day. He wanted to impress upon me, his financial manager, a good lesson in the use of money. He asked me to give him a definition of interest. Of course, I pulled one out of a textbook I had used in business training. He said, "Oh, no, no, no. This is the one I want you to remember. 'Them's that understands it, receives it; them's that don't, pays it.' "

This was one of the great lessons of my life. I have tried to stay out of debt as much as humanly possible. It is a lot more fun to earn interest than to pay it. Develop a positive attitude toward life. Do not let things get you down or become overburdened with meaningless responsibility. Learn how to manage your time and your resources to keep yourself out of trouble. Good planning is the key.

"Nor Do Anything Like Unto It"

All right, question number two. Who has that one?

"Edene Edwards."

It's great to have you here. Will you recite your question for me?

"Many young men and women want to become physically involved while dating, but then want to marry someone who has not been. What do you think of this?"

Well, that's a very interesting question. I'm glad you added that last part—"they want to marry someone who has not been." Isn't that the key? I'm always surprised that this question keeps coming up. Oh, how I wish a real conversion would take place in the hearts of you great young people, sufficient to know that it is impossible to beat the Lord's system. Trying to live our lives outside the system never has worked, and it never will work. Certainly nothing makes a priesthood leader feel more sorrow than hearing confessions regarding moral matters. At the same time he is elated that he can now counsel and help that person who has come to the point of confession.

The prophets of all ages have warned us against becoming too physically involved outside of marriage. Perhaps we could just read a couple of those warnings. Why don't we turn to Alma 39:5.

Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?

The Lord puts these transgressions pretty high on his list of terrible sins to commit. Now let's read one from the Doctrine and Covenants.

Wherefore, I give unto them a commandment, saying thus: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind, and strength; and in the name of Jesus Christ thou shalt serve him.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Thou shalt not steal; neither commit adultery, nor kill, nor do anything like unto it. [D&C 59:5-6]

I like that last statement, "nor do anything like unto it." Sometimes I think we demonstrate our mortal immaturity by attempting to test God to see how close we can come to the line where "like unto it" begins. The only safe answer is to stay out of the gray area. Leave a wide, safe margin between a little good-night peck on the cheek and the violation of the Lord's law. A moment of self-gratification can lead to a lifetime of suffering with your conscience. I have always been grateful my daughters selected young men who had been taught by parents not to spend time alone with a girl in a parked car, or alone in an apartment. And I have appreciated having daughters and a son who have always exhibited high moral standards.

I was staying in the home of a stake president once when I was reorganizing a stake. His wife seemed to be distraught and upset. I could tell she had something to talk to me about, and finally I arranged to stay at the breakfast table a little longer than her husband, who left the room to prepare to leave for meetings. With tears streaming down her face, she told of an act of indiscretion that occurred before she was married that she had lived with all her married life.

She married a good husband, worthy to be a stake president, and she told how this sin had tormented her during all those years. How relieved she was to finally have the courage to confess. The more you get involved in the gospel, the more these sins of the past will torment your soul, until you absolve them with a priesthood leader.

The Savior declared:

That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. [Mark 7:20–23]

The best protection is to keep that which is within you clean and pure. Stay away from movies, TV programs, music, books, and magazines that will only defile the minds of men and women. If you've had a problem, get it cleared up now with your priesthood leader. The faster this is accomplished, the greater will be your joy in this life, and in the life to come.

Keeping the Sabbath Day Holy

Question number three. How are you, young man?

"Fine, thank you. "

What is your name?

"Milan Detweiler."

What is your question?

"My question is: How do I keep the Sabbath day holy? Is it all right to study? What else can I do?"

Well, the Lord has not left us in the dark concerning the Sabbath day. In fact, the scriptures are filled with instructions on Sabbath-day observance. Let's read just a few tonight to see what the Lord has revealed through his prophets, in all ages of time, concerning this most important day in the week.

Let's first look at Genesis 2:2–3.

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

Six days of labor are to be followed by a day of rest. It seems to me that the judge should be how we come out of bed on

Monday morning. If you just crawl out, feeling tired and weary from a heavy weekend, probably the Sabbath-day observance has not been appropriate. You see, I believe you should come up out of those covers on Monday morning more refreshed, more alive, and more enthused than on any other day of the week. If this is not the case, we had better examine what we are doing on the Sabbath day. Test yourself tomorrow morning and see how you come out of bed.

Now let's try another one, Exodus 20:8.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

It appears that the Lord expects us to do more than just rest on this day. He expects us to keep it holy. "Holy," according to Webster, is "to set apart to the service of God, to be spiritually pure." This definition indicates that on this special day we are to keep our lives in harmony with the Lord—a day set apart for service, adoration, and reverence to him.

He has some specific things we should do on the Sabbath. We should attend our meetings and offer up the Lord's sacraments on his holy day. This puts us in the proper frame of mind for our activities on the Sabbath.

I think one of the best ways to control Sabbath-day activities is to dress the part. We always seem to act according to the way we are dressed. If we go around in jeans and dungarees, I think the level of our Sabbath-day observance will depreciate to the level of the way we dress. But if we dress properly—and that doesn't mean having to wear a tie or your Sunday suit all day, but be presentable—it seems to control our activities and causes us to stay in the right frame of mind.

Now let's turn to the sixth chapter of Luke. Here we have an example of the Savior teaching in the synagogues. The scribes and the Pharisees were attempting to catch him, to see if he would heal on the Sabbath day. Jesus,

after healing a man, and knowing their thoughts, stood forth and said this:

I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it? [Luke 6:9]

The Savior seems to think it is all right for us to do a good turn on the Sabbath day—to lift a heart, to help a spirit, to make life more interesting and pleasant for someone in need. You know, I really believe there are those here at Brigham Young University who could stand a little encouragement, a little support, and a little attention, to make their Sabbath day and the rest of their week more pleasant. I think it would be all right for us on the Sabbath day to visit and encourage and lift spirits that need special attention.

The Sabbath day is to be different from the other six days. If we have had a week loaded with studies, we would want a change on the Sabbath. But if it has been a week with the proper mixture of activity and study, then it could be very beneficial to spend some of this special day in study and preparation on a suitable subject—in keeping with the Sabbath day.

Let's try another one, Mark 2:27.

And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.

Thank goodness the Lord recognizes the differences in each of us, and has not prescribed every jot and tittle that we are to follow in keeping his day holy. As individuals differ, so our Sabbath-day observance will differ. We should do those things that will be of benefit to us, for our rest, for our relaxation, and for our rejuvenation, after we accomplish what the Lord has prescribed for us in attending our meetings and being faithful in our Sabbath-day observance.

The Role of Women in the Church

Question number four. How are you, young lady?

"Just fine, thanks."

What is your name?

"Lisa Long."

Well, it's good to have you with us. What is your question?

"Schooling prepares one for a career. Is that an appropriate course for an LDS mother?"

You're concerned, of course, with the role of women in the Church. President Kimball has admonished us:

Much of the major growth that is coming to the Church in the last days will come because many of the good women of the world (in whom there is often such an inner sense of spirituality will be drawn to the Church in large numbers. This will happen to the degree that the women of the Church reflect righteousness and articulateness in their lives and to the degree that the women of the Church are seen as distinct and different—in happy ways from the women of the world. [TSWK, pp. 322–23]

It is interesting to me that the prophet counseled us to be righteous and articulate. I don't know how you can be articulate without being educated and prepared for the world in which you live.

Of course the role of women is a special role—a creative role—the power to bring forth new life and to have more influence on that new life than anyone else upon the earth. A child receives most of its security, its ability to love, and much of its personality from the mother, more than from anyone else. During those short, precious, first years of a child's life, I don't think any of us would want to entrust the development of our child, if we could possibly prevent it, to anyone other than its mother. This is a task that requires education. I think we are reaping a whirlwind of problems with children being left unattended because mothers

are away from home. During that period of your life, I would think you would want to be centered and directed toward the rearing of your children, enjoying every precious moment of their growth and development. Oh, how fast they grow up!

During the other periods of your life you may be much more free to use the education and development you have received from your years of training in school. I see no conflict—in fact, it is encouraged that a woman prepare for a career. My wife is a professional in her field. Even though she does not use it to earn a living at the present time, she uses her education in many different ways for compassionate service. She used her career to support herself earlier in her life, and I think she has always felt more secure because of the training she received from years of study and preparation at the college level.

I think it is a very appropriate course and a needed course for a woman to prepare herself for the world in which she lives today. Many women find themselves providing for their families because of a husband's death, or find themselves the sole provider because of divorce. How much better to try to enter the work force educated and prepared than to have to accept whatever is available at a much lower salary with much less fulfillment all around.

I admire the contribution that women are making in the world. Their sensitivity is most unique, and most needed. If you are educated and prepared, so much greater will be your contribution in a troubled world in the years ahead. May the Lord bless you good sisters, that you may go forward and seek this education—and do all that you desire to do with it.

Never Compromise Your Principles

All right, the fifth question. How are you, young man?

"Never better."

Good. I'm glad *you* feel that way. It seems a little hot up here to me. What is your name?

"Guy Anthony Hesketh."

All right, what's your question?

"My question is: How do I adjust to the world after my mission? Do I lower my standards to be accepted?"

Well, I know from personal experience that one of the most difficult adjustments you have to make in life is to return from a position in the mission field, where you live so close to the Lord, to a position back in the world. My own experience was extreme. I had a month between my release as a missionary and my enlistment as a member of the U.S. Marine Corps. The contrast was overwhelming. But I joined the Marine Corps at a most interesting time. Just a few months before they had recruited a Mormon Battalion of Marines. I followed them into boot camp. The reputation they had made during their period of basic training was most unique. To be a Mormon following that great group was a mark of distinction.

As the years of service progressed, I noticed how apparent those who lived their religion were among their buddies in the service. Those who stooped to the level of the world could not stop the spiral down, and I think they returned home with a heavy heart and a very concerned conscience. But those who were able to overcome, to live as they should, were unique in the service, and were noticed and used. They returned home with greater joy, satisfaction, and peace of mind.

I have found the same thing true as I have ventured out into the world. As a young businessman, it was only proper in making good contacts to attend social hours before dinners. I was required by my employment to do so. I decided that when attending these affairs, I would not have a glass in my hand that could be interpreted as being anything other than nonalcoholic. The first few times I refused to have anything. I just stood, trying to find a place to put my hands conveniently. Peanuts and pretzels seemed to help.

Then a most remarkable thing occurred. After a few of the social hours, I noticed a quart of milk being brought in and put among the other bottles of spirits. Of course no one could draw the wrong inference from a glass of milk. Then, as the months progressed, I noticed they had to bring out two quarts as more and more of the men around held a glass of milk in their hands. This uniqueness became an asset. I am a living witness to you that living your religion, and staying as close to the Lord as you possibly can through all the times of your life, even though you are kidded and laughed at once in a while, is the greatest asset you can have. There is an inner sense of respect that develops for you that will help you in anything you attempt to accomplish.

What success I had in business can be attributed more to the uniqueness that the gospel has given to me than to any of the training provided in schools, or experience in business. There seems to develop a trust in one who is willing to stand up for what he believes in that will stand him in good stead in his accomplishments in life.

Young man, never compromise your principles. Hold to your core of values—but that doesn't mean you should wear your religion around on your coat sleeves and hit everyone in the eye with it the minute you see them. You set the example by the way you live, and that light will open opportunities to you that could come in no other way.

I want to thank you, you great, young people who have assisted me tonight. We hope the questions and general answers have been of some assistance to each of you. I think each of us has found that this life is full of questions. I believe we have also found that there are no complete answers to all of them. This adds to my gratitude for the gift of the gospel of our Lord and Savior.

From the very beginning the Lord has revealed to us the purpose for which we have been sent to earth. As Alma explained:

Now we see that Adam did fall by the partaking of the forbidden fruit, according to the word of God; And thus we see, that by his fall, all mankind became a lost and fallen people.

And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead. [Alma 12:22, 24]

We are not supposed to know all things in this life. The Lord has left questions to be answered and, oh, what an abundance of truth he's given to us to lead, guide, and direct us here on this earth. Let's learn that truth. Stay close to it. Be obedient to the will of the Lord.

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve. . . ." I've made that decision, to serve the Lord with all of my might, power, and zeal. Why? Because it is the only direction that will give us true happiness, true understanding, true joy in this life, and the greatest hope in the life to come. May the Lord bless each of us that in our individual pursuits to find answers to the challenging questions of life we will receive satisfaction and direction from the word of the Lord as it has been revealed to us through his holy prophets.

This is his work in which we are engaged. It is true, it is right, it is proven. It has stood the test of time. The greatest joy that comes is through the observance and following of the way of the Lord. God lives. Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. He has revealed his will through his prophets. His church is established here today. Let's keep our lives in harmony with its teachings and enjoy the fruits of the gospel in this life and in the world to come. This is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.