

“To Everything There Is a Season”

L. TOM PERRY

T*o 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]*

The Lord has a marvelous system for providing for his children here on earth. The creation account found in Moses tells how our earth was formed and how the necessary elements were prepared for life to exist.

First, God said, “Let there be light; and there was light” (Moses 2:3). Then God divided the light from the darkness, and day and night were created. Next, the waters were divided to create the firmament or heaven. The third day the land and the waters were separated, “And the earth brought forth grass, every herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed should be in itself, after his kind” (Moses 2:12).

On the fourth day, the lights were set in the firmament, the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night, to “be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years” (Moses 2:14).

Living creatures were formed on the fifth day—those to inhabit the waters, the land, and the sky, and each “after his kind.”

Finally, God created man in his own image, and told him to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Moses 2:28). He gave him dominion over every living thing; every herb bearing seed and every fruit of a tree yielding seed were given him for meat or food. Thus we see the Lord made provision for seasons, for seeds, for herbs, and for ways for man to plant and harvest.

The harvest is always a special time. I still marvel that tiny seeds, carefully nurtured, produce a bounteous harvest. The Lord’s system is still in place.

I have pleasant memories associated with the fall season of the year and the time of the harvest. After eight years of living in sunny California, we moved to New York, where

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I was again reminded of the more dramatic seasonal changes of a cooler climate.

One morning as I was walking down the street on the way to the train station, kicking through the leaves that had fallen on the walk overnight, I suddenly had the urge, the strongest urge, to bite into a beautiful crisp, red apple. The association of the rustle of the leaves and that taste of an apple just seemed to go together. I could hardly wait to arrive in the city and find a fruit stand to buy one. I was not disappointed; the falling leaves and a big, red apple were just as pleasant to enjoy as I remembered from my boyhood.

In this area, the fall season and the time of the harvest go together. The Savior often used common, ordinary activities of life to illustrate a message. Since this is the season of the harvest, let us look at how the Savior used the example of the harvest in his teachings.

First, let's turn to a parable given to us in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Matthew, starting with verse twenty-four:

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. [Matthew 13:24–30]

Then continuing on, after the multitudes had left, the disciples asked Jesus:

Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. [Matthew 13:36–43]

We must continually be thinking about our preparation for the time of the harvest. Our challenge is to protect the tender plants among the tares that choke out and leave us no credit or return for a life of toil. We must learn what it is that can be harvested to help us enjoy life eternal. Could we look at just the three essential ingredients that will insure us of a bounteous harvest? First, President Kimball taught us about our quest for knowledge of God in contrast to secular learning. In his writings he said:

In what kind of ignorance is the danger of damnation? In what kind of knowledge is found power, and what power comes from knowledge? Let us analyze this great truth. In proper sequence, first comes the knowledge of God and his program, which is the way to eternal life, and then comes the knowledge of the secular things, which is also very important. . . .

Peter and John had little secular learning, being termed ignorant. But they knew the vital things of life, that God lives and that the crucified, resurrected Lord is the Son of God. They knew the path to eternal life. This they learned in a few decades of their mortal life. Their righteous lives opened the door to godhood for them and creation of worlds with eternal increase. For this they would probably need, eventually, a total knowledge of the sciences. But whereas Peter and John had only decades to learn and do the spiritual, they have already had nineteen centuries in which to learn the secular or the geology of the earth, the zoology and physiology and psychology of the creatures of the earth. Mortality is the time to learn first of God and the gospel and to perform the ordinances. After our feet are set firmly on the path to eternal life we can amass more knowledge of the secular things.

The so-called ignorant Peter and John are heirs to exaltation and can learn what they need to know to create worlds. A highly trained scientist who is also a perfected man may create a world and people it, but a dissolute, unrepentant, unbelieving one will never be such a creator even in the eternities.

*Secular knowledge, important as it may be, can never save a soul nor open the celestial kingdom nor create a world nor make a man a god, but it can be most helpful to that man who, placing first things first, has found the way to eternal life and who can now bring into play all knowledge to be his tool and servant. [Spencer W. Kimball, *President Kimball Speaks Out* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981), p. 90–92]*

A second area to consider in the harvest of our mortal experience is honesty. The thirteenth article of faith says, “We believe in being honest.”

The Book of Mormon tells us about a group of people who were “distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end” (Alma 27:27).

Because of their honesty, these people were noted by their fellow beings, as well as by God. It is important to learn what honesty is, how we are tempted to be dishonest, and how we can overcome this temptation. Complete honesty is necessary for our salvation.

Elder Mark E. Petersen once said, “Honesty is a principle of salvation in the kingdom of God. . . . Just as no man or woman can be saved without baptism, so no one can be saved without honesty” (CR, October 1971, p. 63).

The honest person loves truth and justice. He is honest in his words and actions. He does not lie. Lying is intentionally deceiving others. The Lord gave this commandment to the children of Israel: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exodus 20:16).

Jesus also taught when he was on earth that bearing false witness is a form of lying (see Matthew 19:18). There are many ways of lying. When we speak untruths, we are guilty of lying. We can also intentionally deceive others by our gestures, by a look, by silence, or by telling only part of a truth. Whenever we lead people in any way to believe something that is not true, we are not being honest. The Lord is not pleased with such dishonesty, and we will have to account for our lies.

Many in the world would have us believe that it is all right to lie. They say, “Lie a little; . . . there is no harm in this” (2 Nephi 28:8). Satan, knowing the consequences, also tempts us to lie and then encourages us to justify our lies to ourselves. An honest person will recognize Satan’s temptation and will speak the whole truth, even if it seems to be to his disadvantage.

An honest person does not steal. Jesus taught while he was on earth “Thou shalt not steal” (Matthew 19:18). Stealing is taking something that does not belong to us. When we take what belongs to another person, or from a store, or our school, or a community, without permission, we are stealing. Taking merchandise or supplies from an employer is thievery.

Accepting goods from one who is dishonest, or taking more than our share of anything, is stealing.

An honest person does not cheat. We cheat when we give less than we owe, or when we get something we do not deserve. Some employees cheat their employers by not working their full time, then accepting full pay. Some employers are not fair with their employees by paying less than they deserve. Providing inferior service or merchandise is also cheating.

There must be no excuse accepted for dishonesty, though many excuses are used. People lie to protect themselves and also to make others think well of them. Some excuse themselves for stealing, thinking that they deserve what they took, or intending to return it, or thinking they need it more than the owners. Some cheat to get better grades in school, or because someone else does it, or even to get even. These excuses, and many more, are given as reasons for dishonesty.

In the Lord's eyes, there is no acceptable reason. President Kimball has told us that when we excuse ourselves, we cheat ourselves, and the spirit of God ceases to strive with us. We become more and more unrighteous.

You might ask, "How can we be completely honest?" To be completely honest, we must look carefully at our lives and have the courage to face the whole truth. If there are ways in which we are being even the least bit dishonest, we should begin at once to repent from them. When we are completely honest, we cannot be corrupted. We are true to every trust, duty, agreement, and covenant, even if it costs us money, friends, or our lives. Then we can face the Lord, ourselves, and others without shame.

President Joseph F. Smith counseled us:

Let every man's life be so that his character will bear the closest inspection, and that it may be seen as an open book, so that he will have nothing to shrink from or be ashamed of. [GD, p. 252]

Third, in the record of my harvest, I would like to have my granary full of eager service. Service seems to follow true conversion. We have many examples in the scriptures of what happens when conversion takes place. I like the account of Alma in the book of Mosiah because of the mighty change that occurred after his remarkable conversion. The scriptures record:

Now the sons of Mosiah were numbered among the unbelievers; and also one of the sons of Alma was numbered among them, he being called Alma, after his father; nevertheless, he became a very wicked and an idolatrous man. And he was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people; therefore he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities.

And he became a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church of God; stealing away the hearts of the people; causing much dissension among the people; giving a chance for the enemy of God to exercise his power over them. . . .

And as I said unto you, as they were going about rebelling against God, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto them; and he descended as it were in a cloud; and he spake as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood;

And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them. . . .

And now the astonishment of Alma was so great that he became dumb, that he could not open his mouth; yea, and he became weak, even that he could not move his hands; therefore he was taken by those that were with him, and carried helpless, even until he was laid before his father.

And they rehearsed unto his father all that had happened unto them; and his father rejoiced, for he knew that it was the power of God. . . .

And it came to pass after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood

up and began to speak unto them, bidding them to be of good comfort:

For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit. . . .

And now it came to pass that Alma began from this time forward to teach the people, and those who were with Alma at the time the angel appeared unto them, traveling round about through all the land, publishing to all the people the things which they had heard and seen, and preaching the word of God in much tribulation, being greatly persecuted by those who were unbelievers, being smitten by many of them. [Mosiah 27:8–9, 11–12, 19–20, 23–24, 32]

You see the inactivity brought about with a visitation of an angel, which brought a desire of service. The value of service in the Church was of equal worth to me as the years I spent in getting an education. I remember early in my business career I was given a great opportunity with a retail firm. It was a great opportunity. Of course, immediately following World War II, employment opportunities were easy to find. Businesses were starting to fill their executive ranks after years of personnel shortages as men and women who had been engaged in the war effort were returning home. After six months with the firm as an internal auditor, I was promoted to controller of one of their units. I was poorly prepared for such a promotion. I left my wife and two little children where we were then living to sell our home, and I set out on my new assignment.

The work was challenging and difficult. It was more than I could handle during the normal working day. I found myself often working through the night, catching an occasional nap at my desk, to keep going as the night progressed. In fact, it turned out to be almost every other night that I would remain in the office.

In a couple of weeks our home sold, and I arranged to drive back to pick up my family

and bring them to our new residence. After getting my family settled, I let my wife know what my work schedule was. Needless to say, she wasn't very happy with the arrangement and the burden she had at home with two small children. She wanted some assistance there. I tried to explain how burdened I was at the office and that it wouldn't last forever.

After just a few days of having the family together again, I was home having dinner one evening expecting to go back to the office. A car pulled up in front of our apartment. A man came to the door and introduced himself as a member of our stake presidency. He invited me to come out and visit with him in his car. As we approached the car, I could see a counselor from our bishopric seated in the front seat. Inside the car, it was explained to me that they were reorganizing the bishopric of our ward on the next Sunday, and the counselor was to become the new bishop. He turned to me and called me to become his second counselor.

I paused for some time before responding, wondering how I could take on any more in my life. However, the example and training I had received in my home as I was growing up fortified and strengthened me, and I agreed to serve. It turned out to be one of the great blessings of my life. This new bishop taught me the art of delegation and how to organize my time much better. My life became almost normal once again, which, of course, pleased my wife and family.

This was followed by service in two bishoprics, two high councils, two stake presidencies, and finally as a stake president before being called to serve as a General Authority in Salt Lake. Church service is the best schoolmaster I know to teach human relations, a quality I believe is essential to all who want to succeed. It is difficult to stay even with the Lord. The more you give, the greater will be your blessings.

In conclusion, let us turn to the writings of Paul to the Galatian Saints:

Be ye not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

And let us not weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. [Galatians 6:7–10]

As we experience the beauties of another plentiful harvest season, may it remind us of the preparation we must continually be making to ensure ourselves of a bounteous harvest from the efforts of a lifetime, so that we may reap the rewards of enjoying life eternal with him who is the creator of all. May I urge you to do regular personal evaluations on the following important lifetime efforts:

1. Remember in your quest for knowledge to *balance your studies between gospel truths and secular learning*. The Lord tells us in the Doctrine and Covenants to “seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom, seek learning even by study and also by faith” (D&C 109:7).

2. Remember the *value of absolute integrity and honesty*.

3. Learn the joy of *gospel service*.

Your good works will be rewarded: Our Lord and Savior will bless your righteous efforts with a complete and fulfilling life.

I give you my solemn witness that God lives! Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. We are engaged in his work. It is my witness to you if you follow him you will find that fulfillment you are seeking to find in this mortal experience which is yours. May God bless each of us with a firm determination to follow the counsel we’ve been given in the holy scriptures is my humble prayer, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.