

Enter to Learn—Go Forth to Serve

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As you enter the BYU campus, prominently displayed is the challenge “Enter to Learn—Go Forth to Serve.” This challenge not only applies to BYU students but could apply to others as well. It would also be appropriate and correct to say this challenge represents the purpose of our mortal experience.

I would imagine all of us have moments when we sit, ponder, and meditate on who we are and how we are spending the time the Lord has allocated to us. Tonight I want each of you to think about where you are in the grand design that is unfolding before you. The desired objective of our evening of reasoning together is that we may all commit to spending time each day, each week, each year to check the course we have charted for ourselves.

You have arrived at that exciting time in life when so many major decisions must be made. For some, there is the preparation for a full-time mission; for others, the selection of educational pursuits, the contemplation of marriage, and the charting of a career path. All of these are challenging decisions. We must be certain that each decision we make will lead us to that ultimate goal—the one and only destination that will give us lasting peace and joy—that of life eternal.

A recent *Church News* “Viewpoint” makes this statement:

We have many goals, but the most important is to gain eternal life. The teachings of the Savior and His prophets and apostles bear this solemn message: There is no royal road to exaltation.

*Through the Savior’s atoning sacrifice and resurrection, we already have the gift of immortality; all of us will be resurrected from the grave. The journey from that point onward, however, depends on what we do in this life. [“No Royal Road,” *Church News*, 28 January 1995, p. 16]*

I guess it is no surprise to the membership of the Church that the General Authorities spend a great deal of time on airplanes. The Church is now worldwide. Stake centers dot the landscape of many nations. I have had the opportunity of visiting with many airline pilots, and I am always amazed as I look into the cockpit how many switches, lights,

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displays, and controls are necessary to fly the plane. I entered into a discussion with a pilot regarding what could happen if he deviated from the flight plan. I proposed deviating just one degree from the charted course. His reply astonished me. He said for every one-degree variance from the plan, you would miss your charted destination by one mile for every sixty miles you were flying. This would mean that in a flight from Salt Lake to Denver, you would land in downtown Denver rather than at the airport. On a flight from Salt Lake to Chicago, you would miss the airport and land in Lake Michigan. Going from Salt Lake to New York, you would miss Kennedy Airport and land in the Hudson River. Going to London, you wouldn't even make England—you would land somewhere in France.

You can see that a deviation from a flight plan of several degrees would take you totally off course. The pilot explained to me that, obviously, the faster the error is discovered, the easier it is to return to the filed flight plan. If the correction is delayed for a long time, it is very difficult to find the way back because of flight traffic, weather, visibility, and so on. The charted course would be so far away that it would be almost impossible to reach the intended destination. My visit with the pilot gave me no comfort, but it did cause me to think of how the flight plan parallels the direction we chart for our life's experience.

We are here in mortality experiencing a great adventure. Each of us must chart our own course and follow the plan to determine our final destination. With our understanding of the gospel, it should be easy to determine, for the way has been marked for us by the Savior. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Savior said:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. [Matthew 7:13–14]

Repeatedly the scriptures tell us there is only one course to eternal life. The Savior, in the Upper Room on the evening of the Last Supper, was bidding a tender farewell to his apostles when he told them:

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. [John 14:2–3]

The apostle Thomas said, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

The Savior's answer was simple and clear: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:5–6).

How fortunate we are to know the Lord's plan for us. He has marked the path that will bring us back to his presence.

If the path is so clearly marked, why is it that so many deviate from it, thus making it impossible to reach their hoped-for destination?

The road to exaltation and life with our Heavenly Father is strewn with hazards of various kinds. There are tribulations—some brief, and others prolonged. Temptations lie in wait at curves, forks, and intersections. Whether or not we succumb to temptation and stray from our course is determined by how firmly we are committed to reaching our goal.

The Book of Mormon tells us about Lehi and the vision of life he saw. By holding to a rod of iron, people were able to reach the tree and taste the fruit, which was sweet and most desirable above all other fruit. Lehi then reported:

And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.

And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.

And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost. [1 Nephi 8:26–28]

If we hope to arrive at the destination we seek on our journey through life, we must learn to ignore the gibes and ridicule of so-called friends. We need to turn a deaf ear to suggestions to follow the “easier and more pleasant route” pointed out by those who profess to know more than the Lord’s apostles and prophets.

As Nephi counseled:

Wherefore, I, Nephi, did exhort them to give heed unto the word of the Lord; yea, I did exhort them with all the energies of my soul, and with all the faculty which I possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God and remember to keep his commandments always in all things. [1 Nephi 15:25]

One marker on the course to eternal life is the challenge “Enter to Learn—Go Forth to Serve.”

To remain on the course, we must first learn all we can about the “strait and narrow way” we must follow. The Lord has revealed the plan of life for his children to his prophets throughout the ages. President Kimball counseled us:

I am grateful that you and all of us have the gospel of Jesus Christ as a guide, so that we have a

framework of understanding into which we can fit the events and circumstances that we will live to see. It is clear from the scriptures that we in this part of our dispensation cannot be promised by our political leaders that there will be “peace in our time,” but we, as church members, are given the means of having a personal peace, of coming to know serenity in our souls—even when there is no peace without!

By now you are perhaps accustomed to having those of us who are further along the pathway of life describe to you the importance of staying on the “strait and narrow” path. So often we say many of the same things to you again and again, but if you reflect upon why that is so, you will soon discover that the precipices that lie on each side of that narrow path don’t change or become less dangerous; the steepness of that path does not change. [President Kimball Speaks Out (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1981), p. 89]

Without waiting to find out the true meaning of life, many young people jump to conclusions and embark on their life journey unprepared. They follow the traffic without a road map, and, not surprisingly, all they find along the way is disappointment. What do you need to learn before you go forth to serve?

The scriptures tell us that “it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 131:6). This principle is greatly misunderstood. Elder John A. Widtsoe wrote:

There are of course many kinds of knowledge; some of lesser, some of higher value. When Joseph Smith said that a man cannot be saved in ignorance, he meant naturally ignorance of the laws which all together lead to salvation. Such knowledge is of the highest value. It should be sought after first. Then other kinds of knowledge may be added to support and amplify the more direct knowledge of spiritual law. For example, it is a duty of the Church to preach the gospel to all the world. This however requires the aid of railroads, steamships, printing presses, and a multitude of other things that make

up our civilization. A knowledge of the gospel is the missionary's first need, but the other needs, though lesser, help him perform better the divine injunction to teach the gospel to all people. [Evidences and Reconciliations, arr. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), p. 224]

Of course, today we require knowledge about passenger jets, computers, satellite communications, and so on, but Elder Widtsoe's point still holds. What he inferred is there must needs be an order to our learning, the same order indicated by the Savior's teaching: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). Learning about sacred things should come first, providing a context and a need for secular learning. If we want to return to our Heavenly Father's presence, our first priority should be to learn about his ways and his plan.

The world might fool you into believing there is insufficient time to engage in both spiritual and secular learning. I warn you not to be deceived by these philosophies of men. Your learning about sacred things will facilitate, even accelerate your secular learning. President John Taylor said:

Man, by philosophy and the exercise of his natural intelligence, may gain an understanding, to some extent, of the laws of Nature; but to comprehend God, heavenly wisdom and intelligence are necessary. Earthly and heavenly philosophy are two different things, and it is folly for men to base their arguments upon earthly philosophy in trying to unravel the mysteries of the kingdom of God. [JD 14:191]

If we provide a spiritual foundation for our secular learning, not only will we better understand the laws of nature, we can gain a deeper understanding about art, languages, technology, medicine, law, and human behavior never before imagined possible. We can see the world

around us and understand it through God's eyes.

The story of King Solomon tells us that we can ask the Lord for understanding. When Solomon was in Gibeon, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said: "Ask what I shall give thee" (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon, feeling overwhelmed and under-prepared for his new responsibilities as king, told the Lord: "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in" (verse 7). Therefore, he asked the Lord for "an understanding heart to judge" the people (verse 9). We read in 1 Kings 3:10 that the Lord was pleased with Solomon's request. He answered Solomon:

Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. [verses 11–12]

Talk about accelerated learning programs. Do not underestimate the Lord's power and his willingness to bless your lives if you ask with a sincere heart and real intent. He has instructional designs and learning theories that the world's educational psychologists haven't even imagined yet.

Although the gift of mortal life offers a relatively brief period of time to learn of God and his ways, we have the eternities to learn of the universe and all the things therein and to accumulate secular knowledge. President Spencer W. Kimball taught us that one of the several blessings of exaltation is an infinite amount of time to learn about secular things—so be patient, my young friends. President Kimball said:

After death we continue to learn. Exaltation means godhood, creatorship. "As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be." (Eliza R. Snow Smith, Biography of Lorenzo Snow [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Co., 1884], p. 46.) This is in the future. It is obvious that before one can take of the materials in existence and develop them into a world like our own, he must be master of geology, zoology, physiology, psychology, and all the others. It is obvious, also, that no soul can in his short mortal life acquire all this knowledge and master all these sciences, but he can make a beginning and with the foundation of spiritual life and controls and mastery, and with the authorities and powers received through the gospel of Christ, he is in a position to begin this almost limitless study of the secular. [TSWK, p. 53]

So never worry about the time it takes to learn of spiritual things. It is time well spent. It provides a foundation for secular learning. Indeed, the Lord will bless you if you trust in him and learn about his eternal plan, first. And the eternities offer an infinite amount of time to acquire secular knowledge. We are talking about a widening, not a narrowing window of opportunity to learn if we attend to first things first.

President Kimball further states:

Now this mortal life is the time to prepare to meet God, which is our first responsibility. Having already obtained our bodies, which become the permanent tabernacles for our spirits through the eternities, now we are to train our bodies, our minds, and our spirits. Preeminent, then, is our using this life to perfect ourselves, to subjugate the flesh, to subject the body to the spirit, to overcome all weaknesses, to govern self so that one may give leadership to others, and to perform all necessary ordinances. . . .

. . . After our feet are set firmly on the path to eternal life we can amass more knowledge of the secular things.

. . . 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. [President Kimball Speaks Out, pp. 90–92]

After we learn all we can about the course we must follow and have proceeded on the path to gain eternal life, we have an obligation to others of our Father in Heaven's children who need help. Gaining a knowledge of God's plan leads to many consequences, one of the more profound being an incredible sense of incurred debt to the God of this world, Jesus Christ. The plan of salvation balances on the need for a redeemer. Jesus Christ performed this role. He atoned for our sins, and, in the words of Isaiah and Peter, "with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5; see also 1 Peter 2:24).

The apostle Paul felt deeply this sense of incurred debt when he wrote his letter to the Romans: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

Paul identified here a fundamental aspect of service. We serve from a sense of gratitude to the Lord for the blessings he has provided us. Moreover, we must remember that the greatest blessing of all is that he suffered, bled, and died to fulfill the great plan of happiness—a plan designed and executed for us, that we might return with him into the presence of the Father. It was an understanding of this pivotal idea that led King Benjamin to say, "I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants" (Mosiah 2:21).

How do we serve him who made it possible for us to gain eternal life? Again, King Benjamin provided the answer when he counseled the people, “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

The Book of Mormon provides several examples of men who understood the fundamental equality that explains so much of our purpose in life, namely, service to fellowmen equals service to God. King Benjamin, of course, was one of the more profound examples of service to God and man. As he told his people, “And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you” (Mosiah 2:14). King Benjamin chose to be taught the plan of salvation. Then he went forth and served.

Perhaps an even more dramatic example of how the spirit of service consumes those who learn and understand God’s plan is the story of Alma, the son of Alma. We know that during Alma’s youth, he and the sons of King Mosiah sought to destroy the Church of God. His actions were a full 180 degrees off from the course he should have been following. Then a remarkable event occurred. An angel appeared to Alma and set him and his brethren straight.

Can you imagine Alma’s astonishment? Here he had devoted his life to destroying the Lord’s Church and the faith of the people, and then an angel appeared to tell him, “For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people” (Mosiah 27:13).

Alma’s shock was so great that he was left speechless, literally, and he could not move his hands.

Alma was taken by those who were with him and laid before his father, Alma, the chief high priest. The priests assembled themselves and fasted and prayed for Alma for two days and nights that his mouth might be opened and he might regain his strength. Their supplication to the Lord was finally answered

when Alma the Younger stood before them a changed man and spoke to them. He said:

My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.

I rejected my Redeemer, and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers; but now that they may foresee that he will come, and that he remembereth every creature of his creating, he will make himself manifest unto all. [Mosiah 27:29–30]

It had been a painful course correction for Alma. He had suffered untold pain and soul-racking torment, but he was back on track. Now it is most interesting what the scriptures record next.

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. . . .

And they traveled throughout all the land of Zarahemla, and among all the people who were under the reign of king Mosiah, zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church, confessing all their sins, and publishing all the things which they had seen, and explaining the prophecies and the scriptures to all who desired to hear them.

And thus they were instruments in the hands of God in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth, yea, to the knowledge of their Redeemer. [Mosiah 27:32, 35–36]

After conversion comes the responsibility and obligation to share the knowledge received with others of our Father in Heaven’s children.

Alma's life was changed, and he became one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived. He taught with power and firsthand knowledge about the plan of redemption. He had learned—at the feet of an angel—then he went forth and served.

We realize the extent of Alma's conversion to the truth and his resulting desire to serve all God's children when he wrote near the end of his ministry:

O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!

Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth. [Alma 29:1–2]

Alma had come to the point in his understanding of the plan of salvation and service to the Lord where he felt constrained by the reasonable limits of his human body. While he realized it was an unreasonable request, he wanted to do more—he wanted to proclaim the gospel with the voice of the angel who had proclaimed it to him. Feeling in a profound way his debt to the Lord, he wanted to sacrifice much more than all he had to his service.

There are those among us today that preach the doctrine of “me-ism.” They declare that we should think of ourselves first and foremost and above all else. History, however, has taught that selfishness has never brought happiness. An important part of life is serving and sharing. Certainly the soul-satisfying joy of life is leaving a legacy of love and service for others to emulate and enjoy. Bryant S. Hinckley said this about service:

Service is the virtue that distinguished the great of all times and which they will be remembered by. It places a mark of nobility upon its disciples. It is the

dividing line which separates the two great groups of the world—those who help and those who hinder, those who lift and those who lean, those who contribute and those who only consume. How much better it is to give than to receive. Service in any form is comely and beautiful. To give encouragement, to impart sympathy, to show interest, to banish fear, to build self confidence and awaken hope in the hearts of others, in short—to love them and to show it—is to render the most precious service.

[Quoted by Steven R. Covey, *First Things First* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 306]

Friday was a day of deep sorrow for me personally, with the passing of President Howard W. Hunter. We are now separated for a time from a great friend, a great leader, and a great prophet of God. President Hunter was a man of unequalled wisdom. He had an unusual ability to make you feel warm and comfortable in his presence. His courage in facing difficulties has rarely been equaled by any of our Church leaders.

I remember so clearly the Sunday meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve in the temple on the day following President Benson's funeral. As we arrived, it was clear that this was a different meeting. There was no First Presidency. The three chairs in the front of the room had no occupants. The seating of the Twelve was according to seniority—President Hunter in the first chair, followed by President Hinckley, President Monson, and President Packer, in order, down to the last-called member. President Hunter presided and conducted the meeting. After a song and prayer, President Hunter recited the history of the organization of the First Presidency from the time of Brigham Young to President Benson. During the early changes in the presidency, two or three years elapsed before a new First Presidency was called, and the Church was then under the direction of the Quorum of the Twelve. President Woodruff had instructed President Snow that if he should be called home before President Snow, he should

immediately organize the First Presidency. It has followed that pattern since that time.

President Hunter then asked us what would be our desire. Starting with President Hinckley, we had the opportunity of expressing ourselves. It was unanimous that we should immediately proceed to organize the First Presidency. Then President Hunter asked us what would be our wish. President Hinckley stood and said about these words: “This is the Lord’s Church. He is at the head. He selects his prophets by having the person he has designated to lead the Church in position of being the next senior apostle at the passing of the president of the Church.” He then said, “The Lord has selected Howard W. Hunter to be the next president.” President Hunter then requested that each of us respond.

It was a very spiritual and moving experience to have each member of the Twelve express agreement with the Lord’s system and also express their love and appreciation for President Hunter. As I awaited my turn to respond, I thought of what a marvelous system this is. It would not be possible for the Lord to select his prophet in any other way. It is not left to man. It is left to the Lord. He names the man who will lead his Church. It eliminates all balloting, politicking, or lobbying for the position. It is done in a complete system of order.

A chair was then brought to the center of the room, and President Hunter was seated in the chair. Then, in order, each of us put our hands on his head, and the next senior apostle, President Hinckley, ordained and set apart Howard W. Hunter as prophet, seer, revelator, and president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Hunter then nominated his two counselors, President Hinckley and President Monson. We were then asked to sustain his nomination. Of course, the sustaining was unanimous. Because of President Hunter’s inability to stand without supporting himself, he remained seated on the chair in the center of the room, and a short stool was

placed at his feet. President Hinckley was then seated on the stool where President Hunter could reach him and set him apart as first counselor and president of the Quorum of the Twelve. Then it was President Monson’s turn to be set apart as second counselor, and then President Packer’s turn to be set apart as acting president of the Quorum of the Twelve. The whole process took maybe forty-five minutes to an hour, and the Church was ready to move forward under the direction of the Lord’s chosen prophet.

We then had a sacrament song and the sacrament together before leaving the temple to return to our homes. Monday morning the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve gathered at the Church Administration Building for a press conference to announce to the world our prophet. His statement to the press on that day so catches the wisdom, inspiration, and spirit of President Hunter. Among other things, he said:

I have shed many tears and have sought my Father in Heaven in earnest prayer with a desire to be equal to the high and holy calling which is now mine.

My greatest strength through these past hours and recent days has been my abiding testimony that this is the work of God and not men, that Jesus Christ is the authorized and living head of this church and he leads it in word and deed. I pledge my life, my strength, and the full measure of my soul to serving Him fully. . . .

*To the membership of the Church in every country of the world and to people everywhere I extend my love. . . . I pray that we might treat each other with more kindness, more courtesy, more humility and patience and forgiveness. [Quoted by James E. Faust, “The Way of an Eagle,” *Ensign*, August 1994, p. 2]*

He was such a kind and accommodating man. His hand was extended to all he could possibly reach. I think he knew that he would not preside long, for with all of the strength

and power that his frail body could stand, he took assignments and did everything he could to be among the people and serve. It was only when his body completely gave out that he had to stop, and that was only after he could no longer get out of bed.

Quoting again from his press conference, he issued this great challenge to the Church:

I . . . invite the members of the Church to establish the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of their membership and the supernal setting for their most sacred covenants. It would be the deepest desire of my heart to have every member of the Church be temple worthy. I would hope that every adult member would be worthy of—and carry—a current temple recommend, even if proximity to a temple does not allow immediate or frequent use if it. [Ibid.]

His call had a dramatic effect on the Church. Temple work greatly increased during

the short period of his presiding over the Church.

I want to leave my witness with you that Howard W. Hunter was indeed a prophet called and selected to serve under the direction of the Lord, our Savior. How I loved him as my friend and my leader. At these moments in history, may it be a time of checking the course we are following. Are we heeding the voice of the prophet? If we find any deviations in our actions, let us make a quick course correction and get back to the path that will lead us to life eternal. Let us *Enter to Learn* of his great plan that he has for us for the eternities, and then let us *Go Forth to Serve*, following the great leadership, courage, and enthusiasm of our prophet leaders.

I bear witness that this is the Lord's Church. He is the head, and we are engaged in his work. This is my witness to you, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.