

The Great Plan of Our God

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In the book of Luke we find great multitudes following after the Savior to hear His teachings. We read from Luke 14:

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. . . .

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. [Luke 14:27–30, 33]

I'm afraid that I find too many are leaving much of life's experience just to chance, without adequate planning and preparation. Surprisingly, I find when I ask many of you students what your major is, often I receive the answer "I haven't decided yet. I'm just filling in general education requirements. I will make that decision later."

I found a good example in a comic strip in a recent Sunday paper. Dennis and his playmates are gathered around.

One speaks: "Let's pretend I'm the teacher and you're the students!"

Dennis replies, "That's a stretch."

The teacher responds, "Let's all draw a picture of what we want to be when we grow up! Okay, who's first?"

The first one speaks: "I'm gonna be a fireman!"

The second one says, "Soccer player!"

The third: "Ballerina, of course!"

Then they ask, "Okay, Dennis, what about you?"

"I don't even know what I'm gonna be for Halloween," he responds. (Hank Ketcham's *Dennis the Menace*, 21 October 2007.)

If you want the extreme example of planning, you must turn to the scriptures. See how carefully the Lord has laid out His plan to guide His children to their eternal destiny. Perhaps the example of His careful planning would motivate us to give more energy to spending sufficient time to plan what we want to accomplish in our lives.

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testify of our Savior and His divine plan and His mission.

Adam was the first of these prophets with his wife, Eve. They heard the voice of the Lord and initiated the pattern for the dispensations that would follow. Of that momentous event it is recorded:

And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God. [Moses 5:10]

Adam was the first to preside over a dispensation. He was called the father of all living. Adam stands as one of the noblest and greatest of all men. He received the priesthood and was appointed head of the human family. From him we have the beginning of mortal life. Doctrine and Covenants 78:16 tells us:

Who hath appointed Michael your prince, and established his feet, and set him upon high, and given unto him the keys of salvation under the counsel and direction of the Holy One, who is without beginning of days or end of life.

What does this first dispensation teach us? That all men and women are the literal spiritual offspring of our Heavenly Father. They are born into mortality; they receive physical and mortal bodies. These bodies are created in the image of God, as the book of Genesis tells us:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. [Genesis 1:27–28]

We are promised if we receive the necessary ordinances, keep the covenants, and obey God's commandments, we will enter into exaltation and become more like Him. Psalm 8 gives a little vision of our potential. It states:

O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. . . .

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! [Psalm 8:1, 3–9]

Then, in 3 Nephi 27:27, we are given our charge: "Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am."

In this first dispensation we learn that we are sons and daughters of an Eternal Father and have the right to communicate with Him through prayer and receive answers through inspiration and revelation. Included in our life's plan should be constant and regular communication with the Father of all.

The second dispensation is known as that of Enoch. The Bible states that Enoch walked with God. He established the city of Zion, which became a powerful symbol of righteousness that can be obtained on earth as well as in heaven. Genesis 5:24 declares, "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."

Next in line we have the dispensation of Noah. He lived in times of great wickedness. He cried to the people to repent, but his words were not heeded. The failure to heed the cries of Noah caused a great flood to come upon the hearers who would not harken, and only Noah and his family were saved. Thus Noah followed Adam in becoming the father of all living.

The second and third dispensations teach us great lessons of the results that come from the practice of choosing good over evil. Enoch and all who were with him marked the second generation. They were blessed mightily as a result of their righteousness.

In the third dispensation, the people who would not follow Noah found that destruction follows the sinner. One of my favorite parts of the scriptures has always been King Benjamin gathering the people together to hear his voice as he realized that he was now an old man and would soon pass on through the veil. He wanted the people to hear him and listen to his words as final instructions from their beloved king. Some of the words that he spoke are recorded in the book of Mosiah, chapter 2:

I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God. . . .

And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you. . . .

I say unto you, that there are not any among you, except it be your little children that have not been taught concerning these things, but what knoweth that ye are eternally indebted to your heavenly Father, to render to him all that you have and are; and also have been taught concerning the records which contain the prophecies which have

been spoken by the holy prophets, even down to the time our father, Lehi, left Jerusalem;

And also, all that has been spoken by our fathers until now. And behold, also, they spake that which was commanded them of the Lord; therefore, they are just and true.

And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved—

I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples. . . .

O, all ye old men, and also ye young men, and you little children who can understand my words, for I have spoken plainly unto you that ye might understand, I pray that ye should awake to a remembrance of the awful situation of those that have fallen into transgression. [Mosiah 2:17, 22, 34–37, 40]

The gift of agency is like fire. If properly controlled, it becomes the agency of life. If improperly used, it becomes the agency of death. To choose right will bring exaltation. We literally become sons and daughters of God and enjoy the fulness of His kingdom. If our agency is improperly used, we will be denied the blessings of exaltation.

Alma declared in Alma 5:40: “For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.” Thus these two dispensations teach us to seek after that which is good and wholesome. In our plan for life, certainly our objective will be to absorb as much of the good as we can possibly find on this earth. Search the scriptures daily. They will lead you to life eternal.

The next dispensation was that of Abraham. Few characters were as prominent in the scriptures as was Abraham. Like Adam, Enoch, and Noah, his divine commission came through the Lord, who declared to Abraham:

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. . . .

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee above measure, and make thy name great among all nations, and thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations;

And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father;

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal. [Abraham 2:3, 9–11]

Latter-day Saints are a covenant people—*covenant* meaning a binding and firm agreement between two or more people. In the case of Latter-day Saints, a covenant means an agreement with the Lord in which we are promised many blessings by Him on condition that we commit ourselves to be obedient to His laws and commandments. Our plan of life should include always living worthy by making and keeping our covenants. Always live worthy of holding a current temple recommend.

Following Abraham, we have Moses. He was one of the mightiest men who ever lived. He walked and talked with God. He was chosen by God to lead and deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt. He was privileged to receive

for mankind the great law contained in the Ten Commandments. Moses was taught leadership by the Lord in a most effective lesson.

Leadership requires balance in our lives. President Hinckley has given us the priorities we should have in allocating and balancing our time to achieve the greatest success (see Gordon B. Hinckley, “Rejoicing in the Privilege to Serve,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, 21 June 2003 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003], 22–23).

Our *first* priority would be time for our families.

Second, “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102).

Third is the opportunity to serve in the building of our Father in Heaven’s kingdom.

And the *fourth* was most interesting to me. He said to make time for yourself, time to study, and time to meditate, plan, and prepare. Every person needs that time to prepare himself to accomplish the things that he wants to accomplish.

The dispensation of Moses teaches us and prepares us, by following his example, to follow prophetic leadership and to develop ourselves to be more effective tools in building our Father in Heaven’s kingdom here on earth.

Of course the greatest dispensation of all is the meridian of time. Jesus Christ is the central figure in our doctrine as well as in the doctrine of all Christians’ faith. He was more than just sinless, good, and loving. He was more than just a teacher. He ministered on earth as a man, though He was the Son of God. He died, was buried, and rose on the third day to make the atoning sacrifice for all mankind so that death would not hold a permanent power. Because of that act all would rejoice and enjoy immortality. Alma declared:

Yea, this bringeth about the restoration of those things of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets.

The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame.

And now, my son, this is the restoration of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets —

And then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of God. [Alma 40:22–25]

What did the Savior teach us?

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. [Matthew 5:14–16]

You are the light of the world. You have been blessed to receive His gospel. Let your light so shine that others may see your good works and be attracted to learning more of God's eternal plan for us.

Fundamentally, then, we are knowledgeable of the Lord's words as they have been given to us through the ages from His holy prophets. They have guided us into a plan the Lord has established for us. That plan is complete from the beginning of time until we have an opportunity, if we live worthy, to live with Him in the eternities to come.

To me, the messages of past dispensations remind us that we are sons and daughters of an eternal Father in Heaven. We are privileged to communicate with Him and to receive inspiration and guidance for our earthly probation. The second and third dispensations encourage us to seek after the good and refrain from that which is evil. From the next dispensation

we learn that we can bind the Lord in solemn covenant to provide us with the eternal blessings promised us according to our worthiness. The Mosaic dispensation teaches us the principles of leadership that benefit us as we make our way through this mortal experience.

The dispensation of the meridian of time has the promise of immortality and eternal life through the gift of our Lord and Savior. The Lord will never leave His kingdom without a lawgiver, a leader to direct the affairs of His Church on earth.

For this reason, this is the dispensation of the fulness of times in which God has set up His kingdom, which is to be an everlasting kingdom and have no end. Our generation, the generation of the fulness of times, has the benefit of all previous dispensations on which we can build our lives as we understand God's dealings with His children here on earth. We are living in the remarkable age of the dispensation of the fulness of times when the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored in its fulness.

You are children of promise. I hope that you do not plan to be just common but plan to excel. There is no place in this world for mediocrity; we need to strive for perfection. You can obtain perfection in so many areas as you seek and work toward the goals you have established. You have a rich heritage; do not be afraid to think and act according to gospel principles and enjoy its blessings as you fulfill on earth the full measure of your creation as a child of God.

I hope today as you leave this devotional assembly that you will spend more time looking at yourself. God bless you that you may have the desire to go forward and seek your own salvation under this great plan the Lord has given to us. Remember the wonderful promise from Mosiah 2:41:

And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they

are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

I testify to you in the name of the resurrected Redeemer that God has spoken from the heavens in this age of the world and that

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world. Joseph Smith was a prophet of the most high and received the revelations of God for the benefit of mankind, and the keys of the dispensation of the fulness of times were delivered to him. God grant that we may gain our witness and testimony of the great work in which we are engaged as we prepare and plan for our future here in mortality is my humble prayer. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

