

Our Talents—A Choice Gift of God

FRANKLIN D. RICHARDS

My dear fellow students, I am honored to speak to you this summer morning and approach this assignment with a humble heart and pray for the Spirit of the Lord to guide me in the things I say to you.

You have made a very wise choice in determining to further your education; I commend you all for attending this great university. For many of you I am sure it must have been a difficult choice because of attractive alternatives in life or possibly because of the lack of funds. But you chose wisely, and I counsel you to have the courage to continue to pursue your goal, regardless of obstacles that may be placed in your path.

The Greatest Teacher

You have many outstanding teachers in this important university, but today I would like to refer to the greatest teacher of them all, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus did much of his teaching by the use of parables. In teaching in this manner he used familiar illustrations, such as farmers, seeds, sowing weeds and thorns, harvests, shepherds, sheep and wolves, and many other illustrations familiar to those he was teaching.

A beautiful example is the parable of the sower:

Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

Some fell upon the stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. [Matthew 13:3–8]

This parable given by the Savior provides one of the great lessons of life. We are also told that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

In the parable given, the sower had a choice to make—whether to prepare the soil for the seed or take a chance and sow the seed without preparing the ground, hoping that the seed would fall on good ground. He was, however,

Franklin D. Richards was a member of the Presidency of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 5 August 1986.

careless and chose to take a chance, sowing without preparing the soil. Some seeds fell by the wayside and were eaten by the birds. Some fell among thorns and were choked out. He learned that sowing where birds ate and where thorns choked was not profitable. Had he prepared the soil before sowing, he could possibly have reaped one hundredfold. This sower truly witnessed the truth of the statement that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The choice he made before sowing commenced determined to a large extent the harvest he was to reap.

Of course, we all have our free agency, and as the poet so ably expressed:

*Know this, that ev'ry soul is free
To choose his life and what he'll be;
For this eternal truth is giv'n:
That God will force no man to heav'n.
[Hymns, 1985, no. 240]*

Each of us has the opportunity and responsibility of deciding what we will do and what we will be.

Through modern revelation, God's relationship to man has again been clarified. I ask you to seriously consider the fact that the life of your earthly body is your spirit and that God the Eternal Father is the father of your spirit.

What a tremendous effect this has in the lives of those who accept this doctrine. Our Father in Heaven loves each and every one of us and is interested in our welfare and growth and development. In fact, it is his work and glory “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Again, let me say that we know not only that we have a spark of divinity within us, but that we are actually spirit children of our Heavenly Father and that every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God (see D&C 46:11).

With this relationship, we are thus blessed with many talents and possess great possibilities. The Savior set our greatest goal for us

when he said, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). To become perfect requires growth and development, and as we contemplate perfection, we recognize that growth is the greatest phenomenon of this existence.

This Church teaches the value and necessity of eternal progression. We progressed in the premortal existence, and it is our responsibility and opportunity to progress in this estate and throughout all eternity. During his earthly ministry the Savior gave two parables dealing with the requirement that we must develop the talents with which we are endowed. These parables are the parable of the entrusted talents and the parable of the pounds.

The talent was an ancient weight and money unit.

The dictionary defines talent as “the abilities, powers, and gifts bestowed upon a man; natural endowments; thought of as a divine trust. A natural capacity or gift.”

The parable of the entrusted talents was given to the Savior's apostles, and in it the Savior told of a man who was about to leave on a long trip and who, therefore, called his servants together and gave them his goods. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one. To each man he gave according to his ability.

While the master was away, the one that received five talents put them to use and made five more talents. The one that received two talents put them to use and made two more. But the one that received the one talent hid it in the ground.

After a period of time, the master returned and asked for an accounting. Unto the servants that had doubled their talents the master said, “Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:23).

The master called the servant that hid his talent and did not multiply it a slothful

servant, and said he would take the one talent from him and give it to the servant that had ten talents.

Whereas, the parable of the entrusted talents was given to his apostles, the parable of the pounds was given to a mixed multitude on the Savior's last journey from Jericho to Jerusalem (see Luke 19), and although there are some differences in the two parables, in essence they teach the same truths and principles.

From the man endowed with many talents more was expected than from the men with lesser talents, yet all were expected to multiply such talents as they were given. In each parable, although relatively little was expected of the men given one talent or one pound, each failed to use his talent. Good use of the talent on the part of the man given one talent was just as important and necessary as on the part of the men given two and five talents.

In this dispensation the Lord has been equally direct in his charge to his children. He has told us that he has given us many things, "For the benefit of the church of the living God, that every man may improve upon his talents, that every man may gain other talents, yea, even an hundred fold" (D&C 82:18).

He has admonished us that "Of him unto whom much is given much is required" (D&C 82:3). He also says,

But with some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths, but they hide the talent which I have given unto them, because of the fear of men. Wo unto such, for mine anger is kindled against them.

And it shall come to pass, if they are not more faithful unto me, it shall be taken away, even that which they have. [D&C 60:2–3]

And then we are charged, "Thou shalt not idle away thy time, neither shalt thou bury thy talent that it may not be known" (D&C 60:13). The Savior evidenced little regard for the slothful servant. He expects us to work and

to use our initiative. These scriptures clearly emphasize our obligations to use and develop the gifts and talents we have been blessed with—or shall we say to develop the spark of divinity within us? Human experience confirms the soundness of this doctrine.

How To

All of us should be concerned about *how* to best develop our gifts and talents. First, we should recognize our talents and make up our minds to pay the price necessary to develop them. The price to be paid in developing talents includes among other things faith, study, and persistence.

In developing faith we must never overlook the fact that we are spirit children of God the Eternal Father and that our Father in Heaven will assist us in developing our talents as we do our part. One way in which he will assist us is to open up opportunities for us to use our talents.

Some recognize their talents, but we are told they do not use them because of the fear of men.

Fear destroys faith and deprives us of many blessings. This is clearly brought out in a revelation when the Lord said,

Ye endeavored to believe that ye should receive the blessing which was offered unto you; but behold, verily I say unto you there were fears in your hearts, and verily this is the reason that ye did not receive. [D&C 67:3]

We must therefore overcome fear. The Lord has told us that if we are prepared, we shall not fear (see D&C 38:30).

Preparation involves study, and we are also counseled to "seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118). President Benson has specifically suggested that we study the Book of Mormon.

Eternal progress involves continual study. Increased learning gives us confidence, and

confidence engenders faith, and faith banishes fear. I therefore encourage you to never cease to study—this being an important part of developing your talents. We should appreciate that talents are developed by use, and they will not grow and multiply unless they are used.

This principle was clearly taught in the Savior’s parables. As we develop our talents, we should develop the spirit of sharing or giving, not only with those who are closest to us but with all of God’s children. Remember the words of King Benjamin: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). The Lord wants us to enjoy our talents, but he also expects us to use them for the enjoyment and benefit of others and to build the kingdom of God.

Today we hear much about the need of challenges for the youth as well as for our senior citizens. Despite the fact that we are living in a troublesome period, we are living in the dispensation of the fulness of times, a most wonderful period in the history of the world—yes, in a new era of growth and development. Opportunities today, for young and old, exceed those of any other age.

We should be grateful to live at this particular time when the Spirit of the Lord is being poured out upon the people of the earth so abundantly. One of the important and distinguishing features of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that its affairs are administered by the lay members of the Church rather than by paid clergy.

I have been told by some of my nonmember friends that the thing about the Church that has impressed them the most is that it gives every person a chance to serve regardless of his age. How true this is.

The Church in reality is a vehicle for the growth and development of God’s children. The priesthood quorums, Primary, Young Women, Sunday School, Relief Society, and other Church organizations in their various

activities and programs, all contribute to the development of their members’ talents and provide opportunities for them to be shared with others.

Thus, as stated, exciting and challenging leadership opportunities are afforded men, women, and children of all ages to become involved in interesting and worthwhile projects. This is not only a great opportunity, but likewise a responsibility for Church members because the future growth of the Church is dependent upon the development of leaders—leaders for the general Church administration as well as for missions, stakes, wards, priesthood quorums, auxiliaries, and other Church organizations and activities.

Talents may be developed in many areas of teaching, speaking, missionary work, music, drama, dancing, athletics of many kinds, Scout work, genealogical work, temple work, welfare programs, compassionate service, and many other fields that might be mentioned—all contributing to the development of talents and leadership.

Do You Feel Inadequate?

Frequently, when a person is asked to accept a position in the Church he is prone to say, “Oh, I can’t do that. I haven’t as much experience or education as someone else who may have been serving.” But with our faith, study, work, and prayer, the Lord will make it possible for us to accomplish things that seem impossible.

Our measuring stick should not be someone else’s accomplishments but our own capabilities. Are we truly doing our best? Are we anxious to develop our talents to the greatest degree and use them in building the kingdom of God? When a person does this he develops his talents, is happy, and grows in knowledge and spirit. The Lord will make you equal to every task you are called upon to perform as you do your part.

President Heber J. Grant used to frequently use this quote: “That which we try to do, and persist in doing, becomes easy to do, not because its nature is changed, but because our power to do is developed” (Josiah Gilbert Holland [Timothy Titcomb, pseud.], *Gold-Foil: Hammered from Popular Proverbs* [New York: Charles Scribner, 1859], 291). President Grant exemplified this principle throughout his entire life, and his persistence no doubt played a great part in many of his accomplishments.

As a young man I was thrilled and inspired by the stories of this great Church leader—how, even though seemingly lacking in some talents, through determination and persistence he developed outstanding skill. As a boy he was a very poor penman, and his teacher criticized his writing, saying it was almost impossible to read. This was a challenge to President Grant, and he practiced writing hours upon hours until he finally became an expert penman.

Magnify Each Talent

Recently I listened to a new convert tell in a meeting how he had three Church assignments. First, he put the flag up each day in front of the chapel. He then briefly explained the meaning of the flag to him. Second, he kept the hymnbooks in repair. Here he mentioned how these hymns were so inspiring and contained much doctrine and prophesy. He briefly referred to the hymn “O, My Father” and its reference to a Mother in Heaven. Third, he was a home teacher and explained what this service can mean to both the teacher as well as to the person being visited and taught.

This man enjoyed and appreciated these three opportunities to serve and was blessing the lives of others as well as magnifying his talents.

Sometimes we hear of someone thinking his or her assignment is not very important. This reminds me of a young man who gave his intended wife a diamond engagement ring.

In doing so, he remarked, “It isn’t very big.” Whereupon she replied, “It’s as big as we make it.” There are no unimportant callings in the Church.

This is a time of preparation for some other assignment and responsibility. We will be given increased opportunities and responsibilities as we serve with an eye single to the glory of God. We will be magnified and our talents will be increased—yes, even a hundredfold (see D&C 82:18). As we develop our talents and share them in serving our fellowmen, we will find great peace, happiness, joy, and contentment, as well as growth and development.

As previously stated, we are living in a troublesome period, but we are living in the dispensation of the fulness of times, when, in my opinion, the Spirit of the Lord is being poured out on the face of the earth more today than ever before.

I am grateful that my spirit was reserved to come to this earth at this time—in the dispensation of the fulness of times. This dispensation was opened by one of the greatest manifestations of the Godhead ever made to man when God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ appeared to the boy Joseph Smith. Through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fulness was restored, the power to act in the name of God was restored, and God’s church was reestablished upon the earth with apostles and prophets guiding and directing the affairs of the kingdom of God on the earth today.

I bear you my witness that our beloved prophet, Ezra Taft Benson, is guiding this Church under the direction of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Most of you have this same testimony. What a tremendous effect this knowledge has in the lives of those who accept his doctrine. We know that our Father in Heaven loves us and is interested in our welfare, growth, and development. Yes, he has said, “This is my work and my glory—to bring

to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

May we live the gospel principles and follow the counsel of our leaders, and may the

choice blessings of our Father in Heaven be with you, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.