

Lessons from the Savior's Young Adult Life

KENT F. RICHARDS

I feel honored and humbled to have received the assignment from the First Presidency to speak to you precious young people today. I hope that you have an appreciation of how much the prophet and the First Presidency care about you and love you. You are among “the noble and great.”¹

[A man arrived] *home from work to find a very small girl sitting on the curb in front of his house, crying. He asked if he could help. Through her sobs she explained that she was lost. He told her that this was his house and his wife was inside. He told her he knew she shouldn't go with strangers, but if she felt comfortable going inside, he and his wife would try to find her home. They went into his house, and his wife, Linda, began to console the little girl. "I'm sure you must be very frightened," she said.*

*"I was frightened," the girl responded, "until I saw the picture of Jesus hanging on your wall. Then I knew I would be safe."*²

It is the same for us all. The answer always is Jesus Christ. At times you may feel that you are sitting on the curb lost and afraid, but if you will look to the Savior, He will guide you safely home. He is the one infallible source of help for each of us, my dear young adult friends.

One of the most profound and sublime of gospel understandings is the doctrine of law. It is stated so simply in the Doctrine and Covenants: “That which is governed by law is also *preserved* by law and *perfected* and *sanctified* by the same.”³ By law, the Father governs us within His great plan of happiness. He sent His Son to show us the way. We learn of Him. We follow Him. We have faith in Him. We pray in His name. Because of His enabling Atonement we can grow, repent, and do what is necessary to invite the fulness of Heavenly Father's blessings. And we do *all* of this by law. Within the law, each of us is fully responsible. To have the law work in our lives, we must act; we must stand up from the curb and follow Him.

In my sweet interactions with young people in both single and married stakes and as a mission president, I have seen how each young person must discover and then choose to walk his or her own personal path. Sometimes we are tempted to measure our progress by looking at what others are doing or have

Kent F. Richards was a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 10 March 2015.

achieved. Your path is unique to you. Only you can receive heavenly guidance to pursue your path. If you choose to take detours, then you and only you can find your way back. President Henry B. Eyring taught:

*Heavenly Father has perfect foresight, knows each of us, and knows our future. He knows what difficulties we will pass through. He sent His Son to suffer so that He would know how to succor us in all our trials.*⁴

Christ understands and is aware of your personal young adult decisions; your questions, hopes, dreams, and needs; and the intents of your heart⁵—and even your temptations. These key years are vitally important in your eternal life. No longer are they just “preparatory” years for your future. They are your future. Of course you will continue to grow, but the “now” of your young adult years is foundational to your “divine destiny as an heir of eternal life.”⁶ The answers for you are always in Jesus Christ as you do your part to follow Him.

Will you look carefully with me at Christ’s own young adult years to find patterns that you may follow as you answer the whys, whats, and hows of life? How did He prepare and navigate His own path? What specific lessons did He learn? What did He need to do to achieve the fulness of His mortal experience? Let us look at four things that Christ Himself did in His formative years.

1. Christ Learned Through His Own Experiences

We must remember that Christ came to mortality as a God. In condescension God Himself came down to the lowest station in mortality, yet He was “full of grace and truth.”⁷ He was not here to be tested as we are. He was already God. He did not need to learn faith. He had all power and all knowledge and held the keys from His Father for the salvation

of all of Heavenly Father’s children.⁸ Yet with all that, He did not possess the fulness at first. He, God the Son, had to learn some things in mortality that He apparently could not have known otherwise. Paul told us that He “*learned . . . obedience by the things which he suffered.*”⁹ The Doctrine and Covenants teaches us in section 93:

And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; . . . until he received a fulness. . . .

And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son.

*And I, John, bear record that he received a fulness of the glory of the Father.*¹⁰

This completeness for Him came *after* His years of preparation—at the age of thirty as He was about to *begin* His ministry. These thirty years—His formative young adult years—were to teach Him the things He personally needed to understand by experience.

What about you? Can you identify your own learning and applying of eternal principles of the law through your own experiences? Are you “filling” your soul? You can become more complete men and women of Christ, especially in these stretching and learning years of today.

I suspect that even in Christ’s learning years He developed through a multitude of small choices rather than just through a few monumental decisions. You may not even recognize the significance of little day-to-day choices that you make today until later in life as you see the unfolding of the consequences of your choices today.

I decided early that I wanted to become a physician and, because of certain circumstances, was able to start at the university early. I focused on completing as many pre-med courses as possible before my mission

and even went to school in the summer so that I could finish the physics series. Because I had nearly completed my pre-med requirements, with permission I took the MCAT test on a Saturday while I was in the Language Training Mission before my mission to Mexico. As I look back now, it seems impossible, even crazy. But that crazy yet inspired process allowed me to come home and then apply for and be ready to start medical school just weeks after my sweetheart, Marsha, and I were married. I was twenty-two. I couldn't foresee the future, but at one step at a time it unfolded and felt right.

More important than our secular details, which can be measured, things were happening inside of me and inside of us as a couple. We were blessed with two sons while I was in medical school and with three more sons during my residency. We paid our meager tithing, as you do, and learned to contribute fast offerings. We read scriptures daily, prayed, and attended the temple, as you do. We accepted callings and served others, even when it was seemingly inconvenient. This wonderful process of learning, applying, and becoming was happening for us. We were experiencing what we personally needed to know and understand and could not learn any other way.

2. Christ Grew

In the very few verses of scripture that we have describing Christ's young adult years, we learn about the patterns of His learning process. He "*increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*"¹¹ He "*waxed strong.*"¹² While "[growing] up with his brethren,"¹³ He learned and applied the very celestial attributes He later taught.

He was always perfect, but surely His young adult growing years were not easy. Did His siblings even like Him? Did they understand Him? What was daily life like? Did He get sick? Did He want to heal His family when they got sick? In Christ's later life He taught—likely

reflecting upon His own experience—that "a prophet [has] honour, [except] in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house."¹⁴ His was not a test of faith but a test of constant perfection—with His complete knowledge and power—in an imperfect world. Waxing strong must have included for Him, as it does for us, perfecting those very attributes that He exemplified.

Please note that your growth is not defined by external circumstances or appearances. Your growth is personal and comes from within. You are defined by how you discover your own path and then overcome all of the obstacles that seem to make it hard to progress. Elder Neal A. Maxwell often taught about our "customized curriculum"¹⁵—that which we personally need to learn and experience. I remember during those difficult years of medical training working more than 100 hours a week at the hospital, trying to support a little family; serving in heavy Church assignments; and hearing Elder Boyd K. Packer talk about "packages of provisions"¹⁶ provided personally for us at critical times along the way. The Father knows our needs and knows our future. He sends us sustaining blessings just as we need them—but, in our experience, only as we are doing our best. Increasing in wisdom, stature, and favor requires our moral agency and action.

I asked our children, former BYU students, to share key lessons they had learned here. One said, "I had to decide what was important and do it, even if it was hard."

In the university stake in which I most recently served, we saw these same lessons unfold in the lives of precious young married students who were seeking high educational goals even when those goals seemed impossible; beginning a family even when desperately poor; and humbly serving the Lord, especially when it was hard.

"Hard" has always been part of the formula. "Hard" seems to be required for growth. The

Savior learned and suffered through personal, deep, searing contradictions and indignities that He humbly allowed.

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, . . .

*For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour [us] that are tempted.*¹⁷

*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*¹⁸

In Joseph Smith's deepest learning experience in Liberty Jail, the Savior taught him that he needed to learn by his own experience the attributes that He, the Savior, had perfected. Perhaps these very attributes represent the fulness that we are all seeking to attain. The Savior enumerated them: patience, gentleness, kindness, meekness, persuasion, love unfeigned, and long-suffering¹⁹—not only suffering the contradictions and indignities of life but humbly allowing them.

The prophet Lehi foresaw the Savior in that indignity and suffering:

*And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men.*²⁰

You too must learn and apply these celestial attributes as He did. Sometimes they may seem to be forced upon you. But you cannot learn the fulness without them.

3. Christ Waited for the Time of His Ministry

Christ "waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come."²¹ Did His waiting mean inaction or the equivalent of just playing

video games while waiting for circumstances to come together to make it *easy* to begin His ministry? At age twelve He urgently said to His mother, after teaching the elders in the temple for three days, "I *must* be about my Father's business."²² Then He was required to be patient and wait for another *eighteen years* to begin His critical mortal ministry. Surely this was a difficult, stretching time as He experienced the infirmities that are common to us all. Throughout this learning process He was tutored by the Spirit.

Isaiah taught, "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."²³ Christ did nothing "but the will of [His] Father."²⁴ He waited for His Father's will and then fulfilled it perfectly. "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, having lived with his father."²⁵ "And after many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh."²⁶

Let me share with you a time of waiting upon the Lord in our family. We asked our teenage children to be home by 9:30 on a Saturday night. There would be an envelope waiting. One of the children read aloud, over the signature of the First Presidency, a mission call for our family. Suddenly everything changed—the future of the football team, the dance company, violin and piano lessons, lawn jobs, friends, and dreams. There were tears.

We went from room to room that night wiping wet cheeks and rubbing backs. In our seventeen-year-old son's room we found him ramrod straight on the edge of his bed looking across to his bulletin board, where there were pictures of his football team, his brother on a mission, his family, the prophet, and Jesus Christ.

By morning all eyes were dry, and sitting on the second row in sacrament meeting, we sang, "I'll go where [and when and how and why] you want me to go, dear Lord."²⁷ We waited to find out where that would be. We waited as we

put our lives in order, shifted vision, adjusted expectations, and squared our shoulders. We watched through each new step, through the living of it, and through what was hard and what was wonderful, until years later each child, in his or her own way, said, “Everything that is good in our lives is because we served.”

We each come to learn our Father’s will for us, but the Lord’s timing is not always our timing. Yet His way is always good. “All things work together for good to them that love God.”²⁸ If there was great purpose in Christ’s waiting “upon the Lord” during His young years, there must be a vital need for you to also wait upon the Lord.

Faithful, patient waiting implies that we strive daily to do the little things: daily scripture study, no matter our schedules; daily prayers with hearts drawn out always; daily worthiness for the companionship of the Holy Ghost; and daily diligence to keep our environment fit for the Spirit. Are you waiting for some external circumstance to compel you to action? Are you waiting to be perfectly assured of the end before you dare to begin? Are you waiting upon the Lord or sometimes just waiting *until* you graduate or marry or begin a family or qualify for life’s work before you fully commit? When does your ministry begin? Is it now? Don’t you think that waiting upon the Lord meant for Jesus Christ exactly what it means for you—doing what still needs to be done to wax strong, to increase, to grow, and to prepare every day to be ready for the next choice or learning experience?

Young adult years can seem to be all about you. Rightly, you are focused on your education, hopes, dreams, and goals. You have responsibilities and important things to do. But when everything threatens to revolve around you and only what you want—when, how, and with whom—then it is time to consider a caution. President Eyring said in his recent address at the Colloquium on the Family at the Vatican that the root problem in families

and in marriages is *selfishness*. You must learn *now*, my dear young friends, to become *unselfish* so that you can be happy in marriage and family and life. As you genuinely serve others now, you will be more able to give of yourself eternally to your spouse and to your children. Brothers and sisters, be sure that the timing of your willingness to enter into marriage is not affected by any degree of selfishness. As you learn to look outside yourself, you open unending possibilities of joy and happiness, and you will come to know even more personally your Heavenly Father’s gifts to you.

4. Christ Made Covenants and Received Ordinances

Like each of us, Christ began with baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. Ordinances are the greatest eternal privilege that the Lord has made available to us in mortality. Accompanying covenants allow access to the full blessings of the Father, who is bound by eternal law to keep His promises to His faithful children. It is His work and glory, and that of His Son, to prepare us for the fullness of His blessings, but, by law, He can *only* bless us after we have made covenants with Him and are faithfully keeping them.²⁹ Even the blessings of the Atonement can only come freely after we make covenants at baptism, continually apply them in our daily lives, and regularly renew them at the sacrament table.

*And . . . then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.*³⁰

The temple is where we participate in the covenants and ordinances that extend beyond this mortality and endure throughout all eternity. There we are invited to proceed forward in progressive covenants to help us prepare for the highest blessings Heavenly Father

has to offer. “In the ordinances . . . , *the power of godliness is manifest.*”³¹ Only in the temple can we make eternal covenants that embody truth, understanding, purpose, Spirit, power, and meaning and that teach us who we are and who we can become. In March 1844 the Prophet Joseph Smith met with the Twelve and taught, “We need the temple more than anything else.”³²

Young friends, you need the temple. You need the temple perhaps more now than at any other time in your mortal life. Elder John A. Widtsoe said:

*Temple work is . . . of as much benefit to the young and the active, as it is to the aged, who have laid behind them many of the burdens of life. The young man needs his place in the temple even more than his father and his grandfather, who are steadied by a life of experience; and the young girl just entering life, needs the spirit, influence and direction that come from participation in the temple ordinances.*³³

I recently had the privilege of being with an Apostle of God as he gathered his large family around a sealing altar during a temple open house. He told his dear ones that *everything* we do in the Church is to prepare us to come to the altars in the temple someday. A son recently shared with me how important the temple was to him when he was a single student making weighty decisions. I felt this among young couples who, hardly a dollar past needing assistance themselves, faithfully contributed tithing, fast offerings, and even to the perpetual education fund. I saw this again as I met with the ordinance workers from the Provo Temple in their annual devotional and was brought to tears as I asked workers who were under thirty years of age to stand. Fully one-fourth of the congregation stood. More than nine hundred young, endowed brothers and sisters are serving.

Every one of you can hold a current temple recommend—either a limited-use recommend

or a full recommend. Your bishop is there to guide you and help you to qualify yourself. Holding a recommend, you can use it regularly and frequently. You only make and receive covenants and ordinances for yourself one time. But each time you return to the temple as proxy for others, your own blessings and promises are renewed. Your bishop is the key as you consider when it is right for you to receive your own endowment. Counsel with him. He will know the recent direction of the First Presidency regarding the appropriate circumstances for you, especially sisters, who desire to go to the temple. As you and your bishop counsel together, and as the Spirit confirms that you are ready to receive this great blessing, for all of the right reasons, you may do so.

You are blessed to have a very busy temple here and to have other temples nearby. You know that going to the temple involves a plan, a little sacrifice, and even some opposition. Sometimes the baptistry is crowded or the sessions are full. You might have to wait longer than you had hoped, but the spiritual power, revelatory help, and inspired insights will come no matter the details of your temple worship. Don’t stay away because it may take longer. Come to the temple for the living water. Do your very best, and the Lord will honor your efforts. Hold a recommend, my dear young friends, and do the best you can to use it regularly and frequently. Then watch for the blessings.

Brothers and sisters, we have looked to Christ for guidance in your young adult years. We have seen that in His young years

- He learned
- He increased
- He waited upon the Lord
- He made covenants and received ordinances

You too can *learn* through experiences on your own personal path. You too can *increase*

with consistent, directional movement forward, finding happiness all along the way. You too can *wait upon the Lord*, acting with energy and faith, doing the very best you can as you watch for His timing and His ways. You too can *make covenants and receive ordinances* and then faithfully keep them, renew them, and watch for their promised blessings.

Eternal law declares that you and I must do our part to be ready to receive all that Heavenly Father intends for us to have. Dear friends, as you follow this pattern from Christ's own young years, you will be blessed and will come to live and love the Christlike attributes that He exemplified. The Father sent His Son to show us and to teach us. This one reliable source will give infallible help if you will follow the Savior now in your young adult years.

At times you may feel that you are sitting on the curbs of life lost and afraid, but if you will look to the Savior, He will guide you safely home.

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. . . .

*For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*³⁴

My witness to you today, dear friends, is that in all of your circumstances, the answer is in Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. Abraham 3:22.
2. Virginia U. Jensen, "Home, Family, and Personal Enrichment," *Ensign*, November 1999.
3. D&C 88:34; emphasis added.
4. Henry B. Eyring, "To My Grandchildren," *Ensign*, November 2013.
5. See Hebrews 4:12; Alma 18:32; D&C 6:16.
6. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995.
7. D&C 93:11.
8. See JST, Luke 3:8.
9. Hebrews 5:8; emphasis added.
10. D&C 93:12–13, 15–16.
11. Luke 2:52; emphasis added.
12. JST, Matthew 3:24.
13. JST, Matthew 3:24.
14. Mark 6:4.
15. See Neal A. Maxwell, "But for a Small Moment," BYU fireside address, 1 September 1974.
16. See Boyd K. Packer, "That They May Be Redeemed," address delivered at regional representative seminar, 1 April 1977.
17. Hebrews 2:17–18.
18. Hebrews 4:15.
19. See D&C 121:41–42.
20. 1 Nephi 19:9.
21. JST, Matthew 3:24.
22. Luke 2:49; emphasis added.
23. 2 Nephi 21:2.
24. John 5:30.
25. JST, Luke 3:30.
26. JST, Matthew 3:26.
27. "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 270.
28. Romans 8:28.
29. See D&C 82:10.
30. Moroni 10:33; emphasis added.
31. D&C 84:20; emphasis added.
32. *HC* 6:230; from a Joseph Smith journal entry, 4 March 1844, Nauvoo, Illinois.
33. John A. Widtsoe, *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 12, no. 2 (April 1921): 51–52.
34. Hebrews 12:1–3.