

A Word to You: Generation of Destiny!

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My beloved brethren and sisters—President Oaks, this outstanding faculty, and you wonderful students—I feel highly honored to be here on this beautiful campus of Brigham Young University. I love and esteem and respect this great University for the wonderful ideals that it teaches and promotes in the world today. I pray that I may have that same spirit that my beloved friend and brother Milton Backman asked for in his beautiful prayer.

You have all heard, I suppose, about the *Guinness Book of World Records*. It tabulates all sorts of unique and amazing things ranging from the ridiculous to the sublime, such as what snake has the longest fangs; who has gone the longest period without solid food; who has the largest mushroom farm in the world; who grew the lemon with the greatest circumference; what person demonstrates the largest chest measurement; who set the record for eating the most bananas in ten minutes; what it is that human beings fear most; who lost the most weight in the shortest time; and so on, ad infinitum.

Looking at the list so far, I must admit that there is not very much in evidence that is truly sublime. Rather than desiring solid achievement, too many people are captured by the uncontrollable passion for notoriety, publicity,

and sheer power of any kind—however futile, foolhardy, or fatal. For utter futility and absurdity consider this: a group of college students, intent on getting in Guinness’s record book, sponsored a widely publicized thumb-twiddling contest. One young man was proclaimed the champion thumb-twiddler in all the world. He had twiddled his thumbs without interruption for more than twenty hours. It is quite likely that these students had never heard of or at least had never taken seriously the advice of Benjamin Franklin, one of the wisest of Americans. He warned: “Do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of.”

Right in line with Franklin’s stern pronouncement is a memorable legend. A sage of great wisdom was asked by an inquisitive young man, “What is the greatest gift in the world?”

“The greatest gift in the world? What that, my son,” replied the sage without hesitation, “would be to have all the time you need”

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(Robert R. Upegraff, *All the Time You Need: The Greatest Gift in the World* [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1960], p.1).

But, mark you, such a measure of time can be given to no one. Each of us must help himself to his portion and learn to use it wisely, else many blessings of this most precious gift will be denied him. For every human being, time is a resource—indeed, a unique resource. It can neither be accumulated like money nor stockpiled like raw materials. We are forced and compelled to spend it at a fixed rate of sixty seconds every minute; it passes at this predetermined rate no matter what we do. We have no choice, no freedom or free agency in this regard. Time, unlike water or practically anything else one can name, can neither be turned off nor replaced. No spigot can be installed to regulate and control its flow, as can be done with water, and no refilling device may be applied to replenish the quantity. And it is now and always irretrievable.

The question is not one of managing the clock, but one of managing ourselves with respect to the clock. In essence, time is the most unrelenting and inelastic element in our entire existence. As Peter Drucker, distinguished management consultant, has said, time is the scarcest resource; and unless it is managed, nothing else can be managed. It is, then not how much we have, but rather what we do with what we have. (Peter Drucker, "How to Be an Effective Executive," *Nation's Business* 49, no.4 [April 1961]: 44.)

The proper use of time implies an understanding of two basic concepts that most of us have been slow to grasp. Concept number one is the haunting thought that time carries no guarantee that it will serve us; it is merely made available to us. Concept number two is the reality that it remains for each one of us, alone and singly, to learn how to get the most out of the passing hours, days, weeks, months, and even eternity.

In this context, the T in *time* stands for the tenacity to achieve worthy ideals and goals. Thus, instead of squandering time in senseless causes and useless pursuits—such as twiddling thumbs, or spending endless hours watching miscellaneous and all-too-often degrading television shows, or participating in other equally certain killers of the spark of life itself—we can productively engage ourselves in meaningful pursuits.

Here is the classic example of how we became what we are now and what we may ultimately become. Jesus taught that "the light of the body is the eye." This, in plain words, means that whatever we think, see, understand, conceive, and imagine acts as the instigator and forerunner of all of our actions. Jesus added, "If therefore thine eye"—that is, understanding and imagination—"be single"—that is, tenaciously directed toward worthy goals and objectives—then, says Jesus in these divine and lovely words, "thy whole body shall be full of light"—or the highest degree of insight and understanding, will-power and motivation, which constitute the sure road to supreme effort and thus to accomplishment and achievement.

Continuing, Jesus depicts the ultimate tragedy in these words: "But if thine eye"—understanding and purpose—"be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22). Or, as another translator has expressed it, "If your eye is pure, there will be sunshine in your soul. But if your eye is clouded with evil thoughts and desires, you are in deep spiritual darkness. And oh, how deep that darkness can be" (Matthew 6:22 in *The Living Bible* [Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, n.d.]).

Never in all philosophy has there been a clearer, stronger condemnation of self-willed arrogance, blindness in discerning the meaning and purpose of life, or even defiance of God

himself. And in the sublime passage that follows, we read: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:23–24.) And in straight, unvarnished language mammon means anything that weakens reason or establishes the power of the body, with its physical hungers and appetites, over the spirit.

Jesus was not uncertain in any way about what he stood for. Every one of us should have etched on his mind and in his heart in this irreverent and materialistic world these immortal words of the Master Teacher: “The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment” (Luke 12:23).

A poor attitude, ignorance of the purpose of life on earth, a self-sufficient arrogance, and a spiritually chaotic and undisciplined life may be fickle, defeating, and tragic.

And he [Jesus] spake a parable unto them, saying, “The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

And he said, This will I do. I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. [Luke 12:16–21]

A modern translator has Jesus putting the same idea in these emphatic words: “Don’t store up treasures here on earth where they can erode away or may be stolen. Store them in heaven where they will never lose their value. If your

wealth is in heaven, your heart will be there, too. Yes, every man is a fool who gets rich on earth, but not in heaven” (Matthew 6:19 in *The Living Bible*).

Urging us to press on to higher and better things, our own President Spencer W. Kimball, in the concluding speech of the last conference, said, “We have paused on some plateaus long enough. Let us resume our journey, onward and upward. . . . We have been diverted at times from fundamentals on which we must now focus in order to move forward as a person or as a people.” (Spencer W. Kimball, “Let Us Move Forward and Upward,” *Ensign*, May 1979, p. 82.) And one of the fundamentals that President Kimball is presently emphasizing is the full utilization of our time.

I recall an incident concerning our prophet that highlights this fundamental. Early in the morning several years ago, during an area conference in Amsterdam, I was waiting for an elevator. When it arrived and its door opened, to my surprise there stood President Kimball. In his usual warm and friendly way he said, “Step in and join me.” We rode only to the next floor together, but in that short time of about thirty seconds he gave me enough challenges and assignments pertaining to our missionary labors in Europe to fully occupy my time for years to come. Since then, I have often wondered what the assignments and challenges might have been had we ridden another floor together.

My purpose thus far has been to make significant and urgent the phenomenon of the fleeting moments in our lives—the stuff of which both dreams and reality are made. Let us now listen to a word from Thoreau, American philosopher and immortalizer of Walden Pond: “If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost: That is where they should be. Now put a foundation under them.”

The foundation might be described by words represented by the last three letters in

the word *time*. These are integrity, morality, and example—qualities so lacking in nearly every stratum of our national life that General Omar Bradley of World War II fame brilliantly discussed the problem in these words:

Humanity is in danger of being trapped in this world by its mortal adolescence. Our knowledge of science had clearly outstripped our capacity to control it.

We have too many men of science: too few men of God.

We have grasped the mystery of the atom, and rejected the Sermon on the Mount.

Man is stumbling blindly, through spiritual darkness, while toying with the precarious secrets of life and death. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience.

Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.

We know more about war, than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living. [Omar Bradley, Armistice Day Speech, Boston, Massachusetts, November 11, 1948]

And Henry J. Taylor, noted news analyst of an era long gone, said this:

Essentially, the problem is one of integrity. In a home, in a business, in a nation, integrity is what upholds all. It is this weakening of integrity that seems to be the greatest illness everywhere. The grand corruption of our age, in fact, is the inability of so many eminent human beings the world over, to practice simple honesty, and speak, the simple truth. [Henry J. Taylor, Radio Address No. 288, "Let the Truth Be heard," from the series *Your Hand and Mine*, sponsored by General Motors]

Arnold Toynbee, a great scholar, studied twenty-six civilizations. Of these, sixteen are now dead, and nine of the remaining ten are broken down and in decline. His research shows that history is filled with the record of nations that rose to power and then died

because their people lacked spirituality, courage, and integrity.

Jesus gave significance to a scathing word in our vocabulary that describes human inconsistencies: he called this instability hypocrisy and the offenders hypocrites. Seldom have human beings so labeled been so harshly indicted. Said Jesus to those who profess and declare one thing and act in a compromising or opposite way:

Woe unto you, . . . hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. [Matthew 23:27–28]

In Roman times, sculptors sometimes sought to conceal breaks and cracks in statues with melted beeswax. The purchaser, thus deceived and believing that he was buying a flawless piece of marble, would place such a statue proudly in his atrium. In a few weeks the beeswax would dry out, crumble away, and expose the ugly defects. This practice of beeswax trickery became so widespread that reputable sculptors guaranteed their works *sine cera*, which literally translated means "without wax." Our word sincere comes from this rebellion against the use of wax to deceive and to cheat.

Jesus cried out for followers who would spurn hypocrisy in both thought and deed, for disciples *sine cera*—sincere, engaged in cultivating and maintaining integrity and morality—whose daily conduct would glorify the flawless example and of whom he would say, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Matthew 5:14). Neither can a good example, nor its force and power.

Perhaps the poet summarizes more sulimely my feelings concerning that attitude and yearning which, if developed in each of us,

will sustain—through example and integrity—morality in our own personal lives. Listen to the poet as he petitions our Heavenly Father for the essential help; these are his words:

*My heart, dear God.
Give me a pure heart—
That I may see thee;
A humble heart—
That I may hear thee,
A heart of faith—
That I may abide in thee!*

[Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, trans. Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden (New York: Knopf, 1966), p.100]

The term *generation gap* is constantly used to describe the chasm that may exist between youth and an older generation. A little thought, however, will expose the hoax in such a posture. We so often get tangled in words to the extent that the words become more important than the facts. In general semantics this is called “mistaking the map for the territory.” And this is exactly what it is.

In our religion and our wonderful Church, there is no generation gap. Age does not divide us; rather, eternal timeless principles unite us. Believing in Jesus Christ and his gospel are basic interests and aspirations that at any age are the same as are the ideals and principles by which we live from day to day. These too are summarized by Jesus in a most dramatic manner during his earthly ministry.

According to the account in Matthew, “One came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” And what individual would not yearn to know, or give anything he possessed for the answer, especially if it came from the Lord himself?

And here it is: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” Note the magical words, “If thou wilt enter into life.” Enter into

life, indeed! Is not that the real quest of each of us? seriously, is there any other?

When asked what he meant by the statement, “Keep the commandments,” Jesus said, “Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness”—and then fall the positive, glorious admonitions: “Honor thy father and thy mother; and Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Matthew 19:16–19.)

What a magnificent program for life at its best! These commandments and all that they encompass constitute a glorious challenge and an unassailable fortress against evil. They involve the use of time in the best and highest sense and will certainly safeguard our integrity and morality and perpetuate the good example.

There is no generation gap in the Church—only shared ideals, principles, aspirations, enthusiasm, and increasing perfection as we continue to enter into life together, remembering these two great guidelines from the Book of Mormon: first, that “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10); and second, that “men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25).

As we diligently strive to crown our lives with meaning, accomplishment, joy, and happiness, let us ponder this magnificent passage from a modern play by Samuel Beckett entitled *Waiting for Godot*. Two tramps are lingering along a country road, and in the darkness a cry suddenly rings out for help. Cautiously and at length they discuss the risks and the dangers of responding and becoming involved. Then one of them says, “Let us not waste time in idle discourse! Let us do something, while we have a chance! To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help, still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment, all mankind is *us*, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it before it is too late!” (quoted by William T. Gossette in “Born to Action,”

University of Utah baccalaureate address, June 4, 1961).

In actual fact, those cries are for you. You are the vital and critical link, the ones who are on the verge of making it all happen, the ones representing the loftiest gospel ideals to all the world, and in you they live or die. You are, at this moment, the “generation of destiny.” For you it is not too late; it is just the beginning. Life for each of you is on the threshold if, as Jesus said, you are “entering into life”—eternal life.

The influence of the gospel will not only dispel the darkness from our own lives but will cast a radiance into the lives of those around us. No one is saved solely and simply for

himself alone, just as no lamp is lighted merely for its own benefit.

I bear humble testimony to you on this occasion that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that this is the true Church that was restored through revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith. I pray for each of us that we may be motivated to achieve the life-stretching, soul-stretching ideals of the gospel. I bear my sincere testimony that there is only one way in which this may be done. That way is to enter fully into life, as taught be our Savior, by the Prophet Joseph Smith, and by our own divinely inspired President Spencer W. Kimball. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.