

“For Such a Time as This”

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As a member of the Board of Trustees, I recently received a framed mission statement of the Brigham Young University prepared by President Holland. I could see embodied in that document the decisions of the board made over the past few years that I have been a part of that body. We’ve discussed curricula, faculty members, finances, activities, even such things as the enlargement of the seating capacity of Cougar Stadium. And this morning I want to assure you that providing you with the very best educational opportunities is the basis of every decision made by that group of dedicated leaders. They want you to be prepared to meet every challenge that awaits you, knowing that schooling itself is a challenge, or one long series of them. With midterms soon approaching, you will be required to measure how well you are doing in your classes. In a very real sense, you do not know what you have learned until you put it to a test.

Situations Reveal Inner Person

A way of life can be designed to create saints, but it is difficult to measure their progress until a situation arises which reveals the inner person. C. S. Lewis gives an example of this kind of examination when he suggests

that a crisis does not cause a person to be charitable or ill tempered; it simply reveals the ill-tempered or charitable person he is.

We are continually preparing for such tests, great or small, planned or unintended, as the circumstances disclose our strengths or our shortcomings.

Such is the account of Esther as we find it in the Bible. The young and lovely Esther had only recently been made queen, and the king, not aware that she was Jewish, had allowed a proclamation to be sent throughout the kingdom that all the Jewish people should be killed on a particular day. Mordecai, her foster father, realized that Esther might be able to save her people. He sent word for her to go before the king and plead with him to spare the Jews. It was a difficult task for Esther, who, although she was queen, did not have the right to go to the king unless he called for her.

If she were to go, and he refused to acknowledge her, she would be put to death, and yet she was probably the only one in a

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position to help. It was a moment of great decision for young Queen Esther. She was being asked to risk her life for her people.

Mordecai helped her to see, beyond her own peril, the opportunity she was being given when he counseled,

Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? [Esther 4:14]

In one of the greatest demonstrations of courage found in the Old Testament, Esther did go, and she won the king's favor. Confronting the king at the risk of her life did not make Esther courageous; rather, it revealed the courage that was within her—the courage, the compassion, the devotion to her people.

I am deeply touched by her response:

Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise: and so will I go. [Esther 4:16]

Few of us will have the opportunity to plead before a king, but all of us will find out at some time whether we can respond “greatly” when faced with an unexpected challenge.

We have no reason to believe that Esther had prepared specifically for the role she had to play, and yet all her life was preparation, as mine is and as yours is.

Preparation may be conscious and skillful or casual and undirected, but, in either case, it is cumulative. As the late Richard L. Evans reminds us:

What is going to happen is happening.

We may not realize it at the moment of choice, but our response is an infallible index of what we have become.

One of our favorite Church stories is that of President McKay when he was a young man loading stock for market with his brothers.

The McKay brothers, unlike many of their neighbors, did not dress in overalls and heavy boots when they were working. By rural standards they were elegantly turned out as they loaded calves, sheep, and hogs into the waiting wagons with speed and grace before an admiring crowd of small boys. Nearing the end of their labor, young David O. decided he would hoist the last hog aboard all by himself. As he started the mighty heave it would take, he slipped—and ended with the hog on top of him and both of them deep in the loading corral mud. The boys on, and peering through, the fence waited expectantly.

Slowly, David extricated himself, wiped futilely at the muck that now almost covered him, and then said to the assembled youngsters, “No use waiting, boys; I’m not going to swear!”

His decision not to swear on this occasion was the same as it had been on many occasions. The control of his tongue, in a moment of stress and humiliation, was reinforced by the countless other times when he had resisted the easy and insecure recourse of profanity.

We rarely succumb to temptation in one overpowering moment. The strength of living by a principle is built line upon line, time upon time, of facing a moment of challenge and responding appropriately. Every important choice is the inevitable result of a hundred earlier choices. And so it was that Esther, who had been reared in a home of faith and obedience, was prepared for her great test of courage. She not only determined to go in to the king unbidden but was ready to accept the full consequence of her act, saying,

[I will] go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. [Esther 4:16]

I thought of Esther when I learned of a young soldier who, upon returning from Vietnam, bore his testimony. His job was to go ahead of his company as they moved into a new area of battle, checking the fields for mines and testing the enemy fire. He said, "Although I knew I might get shot in the head at any moment, I also knew that the next moment would be better than anything I had ever known."

Maxwell Anderson, in revealing young Joan of Arc, another who had lived so that she could respond magnificently to great challenges, wrote lines that might describe the feelings of any young person who must consider giving her life or his life for a righteous cause:

*Every man gives his life for what he believes.
Every woman gives her life for what she believes.
Sometimes people believe in little or nothing, nevertheless, they give up their lives to that little or nothing. One life is all we have, and we live it as we believe in living it, and then it's gone. But to surrender what you are, and live without belief—that's more terrible than dying—more terrible than dying young. [Joan of Lorraine, a play in two acts (Washington, D.C.: Anderson House, 1947), p.127]*

Ability to Adjust Is Crucial

In most lives, however, there will not come the dramatic either/or of live or die, but there may come the necessity to adjust, to alter our expectations. Most of us will have the chance to learn the meaning of "Thy will, not mine, be done."

The Lord has let us see the problem Jonah had with this kind of adaptation, and it can be instructive to us. Jonah was not quick to respond when the Lord asked him to go and preach against Ninevah. Only after his experience in the whale did he accept this call. Then, when the people of Ninevah unexpectedly repented, one and all (even their cattle wore sackcloth) and the Lord did not destroy them

as Jonah had promised, once again he could not adjust, but went off to himself, sat under a booth, and pouted.

He was experiencing what many of you would recognize as cognitive dissonance—the inability to accept something that is in conflict with what you think it should be. Professor Terry Warner's small child said it charmingly: "It's when you know what you want to do and what's right to do, and you get a fuss in your mind."

I think we have all experienced the frustration or the feeling of loss, verging on abandonment, when plans we have counted on seem to go very wrong. But to see someone who can accept deep disappointment and adjust or even triumph is profoundly moving. It is especially so for parents who would, on the one hand, wish to spare their children any sorrow or pain and, on the other, desire nothing more than to have them become strong and able to withstand trials.

Let me share with you the love story of our high school basketball star—at least he was a star to me and to my beautiful blond coed who, as a pep club member, always chose to decorate his room, to make him treats like cupcakes or cookies, and to letter him clever posters during the state tournaments. It didn't take too many of those experiences before they started to date. She loved to watch him play. She would keep the game statistics privately so that she could discuss them with him, encouraging him when he especially needed it and keeping him from becoming too proud if he had an exceptionally good night. Their casual, fun dating turned into genuine courtship with marriage plans—in the future, because he had a mission to complete. Both of those things happened as they hoped they would. Then came their temple marriage. Many guests at their wedding reception would comment on the fact that they were a perfect couple. The bride was radiant and beautiful. The groom was considered handsome. Frequently I would

hear the comment, “I can’t wait to see your children. They will be knockouts!”

They, too, dreamed and planned for the happy day when they would have lovely children, and they openly declared that they wanted to have a basketball team of their very own sons. The day arrived when they were to welcome their firstborn child into the world. We went to the hospital to be with them. Each moment seemed long, and it was filled with excitement and anticipation and that constant hope that it would be the beginning of their basketball team. Their star was about to be born.

When they wheeled the mother out of the delivery room, we asked expectantly, “Well, was it a boy or a girl?”

“It’s a boy!” said the proud new father, and we rejoiced together. Then, they uncovered his legs, and we saw that he had twisted, malformed feet.

Quickly his brave little mother said, “My mother said my foot was crooked when I was born; perhaps they will straighten themselves out.” But the doctor confirmed the fact that only surgery could give him normal use of his feet.

He had surgery. He wore casts, then braces. We laughed when a neighbor boy said, “Why can’t I wear shoes like Davy?” By the way, he was a knockout. He had red hair and a sweet, happy disposition. And he was given a name that connotes a special love, but the basketball dreams and plans of those two people were shattered. They had to begin anew to think about what they really wanted for him. That little boy was taught to walk and play and run, and he can handle a ball about as well as any boy his age, but he will never excel in basketball the way that they had planned.

An even more sobering account is that of my friend whose husband was one of the top ten medical students at Temple University. On the night before his graduation, he fell and severely fractured his skull. He was in a coma

for six weeks. After recovering he had many hard decisions to make—like whether to continue his training for surgery, or if it would be better to become a dermatologist. He and his sweetheart carefully considered the extent of his injury and the demanding field he had chosen, and it was decided that there would be less strain, and probably greater success, if he changed his specialty. Another difficult decision was whether to marry. He asked himself if he would be well enough and capable of caring for a wife and children. After hours and hours of discussion and planning they finally determined that, perhaps if he had plenty of rest and good care, he could continue to heal, and he could assume the responsibilities of a husband and father. Other than the constant pain in his head, he led a somewhat normal life and had a good practice for thirteen years. Three children were born to him and his wife during that time, and then all their fears came to pass. The pain was so constant and so intense, and he became so forgetful, that upon the best medical advice he underwent surgery to remove the adhesions that filled his head. They were successfully removed, but he contracted meningitis with the accompanying high fever. He lost control of his bodily functions. His memory was irreparably damaged, and his wife could no longer give him the complete care he needed at home. He would have to be hospitalized for as long as he lived. Brokenheartedly, she faced the reality that this special chapter of their lives together had to be closed. A new one was opening. It was one of faith, love, devotion, and further adaptation.

For 22 years this courageous woman has worked to support herself and their children, but during this time, through her determined effort, she has made their father a very special part of their lives. She has taken their family activities to his hospital room as often as possible although many times he couldn’t even remember that family had been there.

Many have said to the wife, “There isn’t a court in the land that wouldn’t give you a divorce.”

She smiles and says, “At another time and in another place we want to be together honoring the commitments we have made to each other. He won’t have the encumbrance of a broken body then, and we will be able to live abundantly and everlastingly together.”

Making long-range plans brings us the pleasure that comes with expectation and progress that is the result of purpose. But other essential growth and a more profound joy can often come from adjusting our hopes to an altered and perhaps eternal plan.

Character Is Built Day by Day

This is an important time for you to be thinking ahead and determining objectives, but while you have future goals clearly projected, don’t fail to appreciate the present. Your objective is not more important than how you reach it. We might focus so totally upon a goal that we fail to realize that our life is being spent on our way to achieving it. Santayana philosophized,

Life is what happens while we are planning for something else.

Graduation is important, but the direction your life takes may be more greatly influenced by the things you experience while you are earning your degree. If for some of you the desire for marriage is your reason for being here, don’t fail to realize that the quality of your married life will be affected by those things you are learning, and the time you look forward to is no more important than your life each day while here in your classes.

Someone has remarked that the trouble with life is that it is so daily. But it is our reactions to that day-by-day demand that determines the stature of our lives. How you react when the apple machine eats your quarter or

what you do when the ticket window you have waited three hours to reach closes three persons in front of you—these make a difference; they are building experiences. The everyday prices and not the seasonal sales determine a store’s character and clientele. Similarly, the consistent careful choices, the daily decisions, shape the nature of a man or woman. Esther’s great contribution to her people was made not as a climactic achievement of a long-pursued goal but as an indication of her readiness to respond to a current crisis.

Decisions Reach beyond Self

Esther’s heroic stand in a time of great peril has given others courage to encounter the problems of life. Her selfless allegiance to her people, the people of the Lord, inspires our dedication and loyalty today. In this way her life was not for one time only but a legacy to succeeding generations and peoples.

Great lives have enduring imprint.

Joshua could say that he and his house would serve the Lord because, in choosing for himself, he established a new way of life for his family, and, while he could not control their every action, he provided a model that was their legacy.

In our more recent history, too, we find people who lived as examples. Sarah Melissa Granger was just fifteen years old when she went to Nauvoo to join the Saints. It was the Nauvoo of the 1840 period, with the persecution beginning and the Saints pushing to complete the temple, for they knew that when the temple was finished they would become a covenant people.

Sarah was very much interested in the doctrine and revelations of her newfound faith. She attended the School of the Prophets and discussed the principles she learned there with her father. In later years she referred to her attendance at the School of the Prophets to underscore the emphasis she placed upon doctrinal study among Latter-day Saint women.

When she was about twenty-two, she married Hiram Kimball. Sarah was a member of the Church. Hiram was not. He was later baptized, but, when their first baby was born, the Nauvoo Temple walls were only about three feet above their foundation. The Saints needed money to complete the building. Sarah wanted to make a contribution to the temple project, but she wanted it to be her contribution, not her husband's. Even though he was well off financially and could afford to give generously to the Church, that didn't meet her needs as she saw them. She thought a great deal about how she could fulfill her responsibility. Then, she came up with an idea. She had a new baby boy just three days old. When her husband came to her bedside to admire the baby, she asked, "What is the boy worth?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "He's worth a great deal."

"Is he worth a thousand dollars?"

"Yes, more than that if he lives and does well."

"Then," she said, "half of him is mine, is it not?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I have something then to help on the temple," she said.

"Have you?" questioned her husband.

"Yes, I think I'll turn my share (of the baby) in as tithing."

"Well, I'll see about that," said her husband.

Soon after that conversation, her husband, who was a major in the Nauvoo Legion, met with the Prophet. Her Hiram said, "Sarah proposes to turn the boy out as Church property," and then he related their entire discussion.

President Joseph Smith seemed pleased with the joke. "I accept all such donations," was his reply, "and from this day the boy shall stand recorded as Church property." He turned to Willard Richards and directed, "Make a record of this, and you are my witness."

Then he turned back to the father and said,

"Major, you now have the privilege of paying \$500 and retaining possession, or receiving \$500 and giving possession."

To which the new father responded, "Will you accept the reserve block of property north of the temple (as payment)?"

"It is just what we want," said the Prophet.

The deed was made out. Later the Prophet said to Sarah, "You have consecrated your firstborn son; for this you are blessed of the Lord. . . . Your name shall be handed down in honorable remembrance from generation to generation,"

Sarah Kimball could translate her vision of the eternal truths into daily living. Perhaps her life was best described by a woman who knew her well who said, "The name *Sarah M. Kimball* is synonymous with charity."

Live for the Legacy You Leave

But what of you in your time? You find yourselves in years of expectation and growth unsure of the opportunities and difficulties which life in your future will provide for you. And yet you are here to prepare, and prepare you must. You must develop the intellectual integrity and spiritual strength which will be a reservoir sufficient to meet each challenge with knowledge and testimony. Just as we store food against uncertain need, we must treasure up wisdom and truth that will enable us and future generations to meet each day's certain need with confidence independent of the circumstances in which it is manifest.

A story told by Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone reminds us "that one life is all we have." The way we live it can influence others endlessly. Let me tell you the story.

At the height of the gangster era in Chicago there was an attorney who was renowned for his ability to keep his mobster clients out of jail. Few have been as adept at manipulating legal procedures to protect their criminal clients. As his reputation grew, so did his wealth, and

after a time he had acquired a large estate in the suburbs of Chicago and had married well.

Shortly after his marriage, however, he and his wife had their first child, a son. As this young attorney reflected on the legacy that he would leave his son, he quickly saw that the wealth and reputation as an attorney for the underworld were worth little when compared to a legacy of honor, courage, and truth.

The attorney determined that, although it might cost him his life, he would go to the police and reveal the knowledge that he had of criminal activities of the mob in Chicago. When he approached the police, they cautioned him, saying they could never provide sufficient protection to insure his safety, but despite their caution he gave them information which led to the convictions of several leading members of the mob.

Less than a year after his testimony the young attorney was gunned down by associates of those he had helped convict. And yet he had left his son the legacy of honor, truth, and courage that he had hoped to leave.

In another story of heroism a young man called Butch O'Hare, while serving as an aviator in the Pacific during World War II, was forced on an occasion to return from his squadron to the aircraft carrier because of mechanical difficulties with his fighter plane.

While returning he spotted a squadron of Japanese Zeros preparing to attack his carrier. Although far outnumbered and handicapped by a partially disabled plane, Butch O'Hare attacked the squadron of Zeros, and through his heroism saved the lives of many of his comrades as he demonstrated his courage and skill by disabling plane after plane of the Japanese squadron.

For his courage young Butch O'Hare received numerous citations and awards including the honor of having the airport in his home town of Chicago named after him, "O'Hare International."

These two stories of courage are more than geographically related because, you see, the father of the World War II flying ace Butch O'Hare was the young attorney who had given his life so that he could leave his young son a legacy of courage and honor.

Let me conclude by telling you that at eighty years of age my father had to have his leg amputated, and because of that operation the last year of his life was particularly difficult. At his funeral Elder Thomas S. Monson spoke. He said:

I suppose his greatest battle has occurred in the last few months, but he rose to the occasion, and he demonstrated to each one of us that he is the man that we knew him to be. I've seen courage many times—in the navy, in life. I've read about courage. But I don't know when I've seen courage to excel that of my friend as he overcame the handicap of his lost limb and, to the amazement of the doctors, at his age developed the ability to use his artificial limb in such a way that he could be proud of his accomplishment and could do many things that other people felt he never again would do.

These words and my father's example have been a rich legacy of continuing strength for me and for my family, far more important than the earthly treasures of wealth or position he probably would like to have left us, but didn't.

The queen, a prophet in embryo, the athlete, the medical student, the wife, the soldier, the pilot, the attorney, the Relief Society leader—all were surrounded by difficult circumstances not of their choosing, but the decisions they had earlier made prepared them to respond courageously.

It was so also with Jesus. Day by day he made decisions so that he could be the great example of courage. Do you remember when he said to his mother after she had been anxious and sought him for three days,

Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business? [Luke 2:49]

And then it was that he went with his parents back to Nazareth and because of that decision grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

His character was crucial because, as he was there on that cross, we could see it evidenced as he said,

Father forgive them; for they know not what they do. [Luke 23:34]

May each of us prepare daily so that we may have the strength and the courage to make those decisions that will be ours for such times of challenge as they come to us, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.