

# *The University of Mortality*

L. TOM PERRY

## **Your Turn**

Imagine with me a scene from the premortal existence. The time is about two decades ago, plus or minus a few years. We see an eager spirit at the front window watching the mailbox located out by the street. The mailman arrives and a delivery is made. The spirit rushes out to the mailbox with great anticipation that a long-awaited letter has been delivered.

Plowing through the usual junk mail and monthly statements, we see a large white envelope. This may be it! Eagerly the letter is opened. Your name and address heads the letter. You read on: “Greetings! Your application to the ‘University of Mortality’ has been accepted.”

The letter goes on to give you instructions on the date your first semester will begin and the names of your new dorm parents. There’s a catalog attached detailing information and opportunities available to you in this once-in-a-lifetime experience. The long wait is over!

With anticipation you have looked forward to this day. You remember the time of the Grand Council in Heaven when you elected to be tested as a mortal. You have watched

through the centuries, and now the Lord’s instructions to his prophets ring in your ears.

*Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.*

*Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?*

*Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;*

*When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? [Job 38:4–7]*

Now is your time to shout for joy, for now it is your turn to be on earth!

## **Three Degrees**

Preparation for your birth date finds you studying the catalog over and over again. If you are accepted for graduation from the University of Mortality, it will be possible for you to receive one of three degrees—a telesial

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*L. Tom Perry was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 7 February 1988.*

degree, terrestrial degree, or a celestial degree. The choice will be yours as to which one you will prepare yourself to obtain. The opportunities in the eternities to come depend on which degree you decide to strive for.

As you study the options, only the celestial degree offers eternal growth and opportunity and life with Father again. We read:

*These are they whose bodies are celestial, whose glory is that of the sun, even the glory of God, the highest of all, whose glory the sun of the firmament is written of as being typical.*

*And again, we saw the terrestrial world, and behold and lo, these are they who are of the terrestrial, whose glory differs from that of the church of the Firstborn who have received the fullness of the Father, even as that of the moon differs from the sun in the firmament.*

*And again, we saw the glory of the telestial, which glory is that of the lesser, even as the glory of the stars differ from that of the glory of the moon in the firmament. [D&C 76:70–71, 81]*

The choice is clear. You will shoot for the sun, the celestial degree!

We now turn to the section in the catalog on the required courses for the celestial degree. We find there subjects that are elective and those that are required. Because we are just beginning, we want to start with the required courses. The names of these courses are most interesting. Let us consider the names and course descriptions of just a few.

### **Self-Worth**

Here is an interesting one! It is entitled “Self-Worth 101.” We read on in the description:

*Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.*

*And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and*

*obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come. [D&C 130:18–19]*

The description states further, “It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 131:6).

From this we understand the high priority the Lord, our Eternal Father, has placed on education and our constant striving to better our situation, to improve our minds, and to learn and grow.

“True education,” according to President David O. McKay, “is awakening a love for truth, a just sense of duty, opening the eyes of the soul to the great purpose and end of life” (David O. McKay, “True Education,” *The Instructor*, August 1961, p. 254). He also said, “Wisdom is the right application of knowledge to the development of a noble and Godlike character” (McKay, “True Education,” p. 253).

Man’s diligence and obedience are prerequisites for his obtaining this intelligence. The spiritual level of man’s understanding is determined by his faithful response to God’s commandments. So if his level of intelligence determines the level of his resurrection and degree of glory for which he has prepared himself, then it must follow that those who are more diligent and obedient than others in this world will obtain greater advantage in the world to come.

Gaining knowledge is one thing, and applying it is another. If a man makes “wise” decisions, he has applied his knowledge to the experience he might already have gained, to the good counsel he might have received from another, and to the core of values he possesses, coming up with intelligent thinking or a righteous application of his knowledge.

If we are to survive in our mortal experience, we must be able to apply our knowledge wisely and make intelligent decisions. We must prepare ourselves spiritually as well as intellectually. We must be part of the kingdom of God first, before we are part of anything else the

world has to offer. Therein lies our strength to meet the battle head-on and come up a winner!

If we treasure our membership in God's kingdom, and if we learn by the Spirit as our teachers teach by the Spirit, no matter under what circumstances, we will shore up our defenses and be strengthened. We will be in a much better position to keep our life's priorities in proper order.

There is a danger, however, and it is a well-recognized fact that if too much emphasis is placed on the intellect, if a person learns to lean too heavily on the arm of flesh—that is, so-called “recognized authority,” scientific facts, formulas, etc.—to the exclusion of spiritual knowledge and nurturing, he will lose the Spirit and begin to doubt. And if something cannot be proven absolutely according to the world's formula, he will disbelieve.

Balance is so important in our lives! We must be certain our academic learning, our intellectual knowledge, is balanced with a proportionate share of things of the Spirit. President Kimball has said:

*This time of intellectual testing must also be a time of equivalent testing and flexing in things spiritual too. “The spirit giveth life” is so true in so many ways. When there is an inner-emptiness in the life of man, his surroundings, however affluent, cannot compensate. When there is a crisis of purpose, nothing will really seem worthwhile or meaningful. When man's relationship with God has been breached, we will be as Isaiah said, “restless as the sea which cannot rest!” [Spencer W. Kimball, “Education for Eternity,” Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (Provo, 12 September 1967), p. 2]*

If we value these words of a prophet of God, if we are anxious to be obedient, and if we are striving to be like him who is the supreme example, then we will know that we must be about our Father's business. We will know that secular knowledge, though very

important to us in our mortal lives, must take its proper place, and that the knowledge of God and his kingdom and eternal life with him is the very beginning and end of all we hold dear.

President Kimball then went on to use the example of Peter and Andrew, called to be disciples of Jesus. Though they would be considered ignorant and unlearned in the world today, yet they had a knowledge of that which was necessary to instill in their hearts a simple yet perfect faith. They had an understanding of what was required to reach life eternal. This was an essential requirement for their mortal experience—a commitment and dedication to the Lord to drop whatever they were doing and follow him and learn of him. This qualified them for life eternal—a celestial degree.

According to President Kimball, they will have eons of time to learn about geography, history, zoology, and mathematics in the eternities to come. “Education for eternity” is not just a catchy phrase—its consequences are eternal.

What an intriguing class! We will want to put this high on our list of courses for our celestial degree.

### **Moral Cleanliness**

Here is another course of great interest: “Your Standard of Morality, Course 110.” One of the great heroes we have been able to study in the Old Testament is Joseph. When he was only seventeen, his brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites, and he was carried away as a slave into Egypt. There he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian who was an officer of the pharaoh and a captain of the guard. Even though Joseph was young and inexperienced, he made his way to being chief among all the servants in Potiphar's house. But his position was not without challenge, for Potiphar's wife liked his looks and invited him into her chambers. He refused by letting her know what his standard of morality was.

One day she found him going about his business in the house, and there was no one else around. She caught hold of his garment. Joseph literally left his garment in her hands and fled, as the scriptures record, “and got him out” (Genesis 39:12). He physically removed himself from the temptation.

Joseph would not violate the trust placed in him, nor his commitment to the Lord to follow the Lord’s code of morality. He had established for himself a standard of values that were the same as the Lord’s.

I have made quite a remarkable discovery lately in my study of the computer. There are at least three integral parts—input devices, a storage unit, and output equipment. Only information put into the computer and stored can be produced as output. We cannot expect something to come out that has not been properly input.

It is similar in our human mind. We have eyes and ears to see and hear as input devices. Our brain stores the information we see and hear, and makes it available to us when we need output in the form of speech, expression, or movement. It is only what we store in our mind that will be available to us to produce the output we need for life.

President Romney has said:

*The great overall struggle in the world today is, as it has always been, for the souls of men. Every soul is personally engaged in the struggle, and he makes his fight with what is in his mind. In the final analysis the battleground is, for each individual, within himself. Inevitably he gravitates toward the subjects of his thoughts.* [Marion G. Romney, “The Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, May 1980, p. 66]

Certainly the writer of Proverbs declared an eternal truth when he said: “For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

Pornography, or near-pornography, is easily available to us in the world today. It degrades

humanity. And once we allow our minds to become filled with it, we find that we lose power over our actions. The sexual sins of fornication and adultery seem to follow soon afterward in the lives of those who fill their minds with this filth and trash.

The value of moral cleanliness is great. It cannot be bought with gold or silver. It will do more to bring about eternal happiness than almost anything else we can do. It was Paul who counseled the Galatians when he said:

*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

*For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.* [Galatians 6:7–8]

Moral cleanliness or virtue is a standard of decency that should be observed by all thinking people who want good homes, strong communities, and a great country.

The subject matter of this course will certainly determine the kind of world we want to help build, and the type that we will enjoy living in. It will help us make the decisions that will not allow us to succumb to the pressures and temptations so prevalent today. We will have the courage to keep ourselves separated from the degrading influences of life and, if necessary, will be like Joseph and remove ourselves physically from them. “And go ye out from among the wicked. Save yourselves. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord” (D&C 38:42).

### **Being True**

Here is another interesting required course. It is entitled “To Thine Own Self Be True 120.” This course will teach us the value of honesty—which includes honor, integrity, and truthfulness. We will study great Church leaders such as President N. Eldon Tanner, who assumed the burden and responsibilities for

the financial affairs of the Church for so many years. He was noted throughout the world as a man of integrity. When President Tanner shook hands on an agreement or signed his name on a contract, everyone knew he could be trusted without question. All terms would be rigidly adhered to in an honest and fair way.

He said:

*There is far too much immorality, dishonesty, and lack of integrity in the lives of those who are leading and guiding the affairs of our nations, our schools, and our communities. Somehow we must get back to the lofty ideals . . . of those who fought and died for truth, religion, and freedom. [N. Eldon Tanner, "Remember Who You Are," Ensign, January 1983, pp. 3–4]*

In a similar tone, President Kimball has said:

*Practically all dishonesty owes its existence and growth to the inward distortion we call self-justification. It is the first and worst, and most insidious and damaging form of cheating, to cheat oneself. [Mexico/CA Area Conference, August 1972, p. 27]*

So often in mortality, men with promising futures justify declaring themselves an unauthorized bonus, only to be discovered and have their careers destroyed. The stigma of dishonesty literally marks them for life. President Heber J. Grant said:

*The fundamental thing for a Latter-day Saint is to be honest. The fundamental thing for a Latter-day Saint is to value his word as faithfully as his bond; to make up his mind that under no circumstances, no matter how hard it may be, by and with the help of the Lord, he will dedicate his life and his best energies to making good his promises. [Heber J. Grant, "As Other Men Judge Us," Improvement Era, June 1938, p. 327]*

You will find those in mortality who want as much latitude as possible, as much gray area as they can find, between honesty and dishonesty. The Lord has established the standard. It is the same as the Savior taught. There is no gray area.

Brigham Young taught the pioneers:

*We want the Saints to increase in goodness, until our mechanics, for instance, are so honest and reliable that this Railroad Company will say, "Give us a Mormon elder for an engineer, then none need have the least fear to ride, for if he knows there is danger he will take every measure necessary to preserve the lives of those entrusted to his care." [JD 12:300]*

William Shakespeare wrote, "Mine honor is my life; both grow in one; Take honor from me, and my life is done" (*King Richard the Second*, act 1, sc. 1, lines 182–83).

Here is a course that will teach us to have a value standard of honesty that will be in harmony with divine law. It will build within us an integrity that will tell the world we can be trusted.

### **Honest Labor**

Now here is another basic course, this one entitled "By the Sweat of His Brow 130." It appears as if in mortality we are to learn the joy of honest labor, how to produce with our heads and our hands something creative for mankind. President Kimball gave us this example of his experience as a boy.

*As a boy I saw how all, young and old, worked and worked hard. We knew that we were taming the Arizona desert. But had I been wiser then, I would have realized that we were taming ourselves, too. Honest toil in subduing sagebrush, taming deserts, channeling rivers, helps to take the wildness out of man's environment but also out of him. The disdain for work among some today may merely signal the return of harshness and wildness—perhaps not to*

*our landscape but to some people. The dignity and self-esteem that honest work produces are essential to happiness. It is so easy for leisure to turn into laziness. [TSWK, p. 362]*

This course will not only teach us to be productive, to work, to be busily engaged, but to not waste our time in idleness. There appears to be another virtue in this course as well, and that is not to waste the valuable resources the Lord has given us, but to preserve and protect them for the use of mankind. In fact, the Lord has told us that if we needlessly waste what he has blessed us with, he will take it away from us.

This course will teach us about the Lord's system of providing abundantly for his children, so long as we will be industrious and take care of that which he has provided.

The beehive was the pioneer emblem. Industry has always been a vital part of the heritage of our Father in Heaven's children. President Grant's words should ever ring in our ears:

*The aim of the Church is to help the people help themselves. Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principle of the lives of our Church membership. [CR, October 1936, p. 3]*

This is a course that will teach a standard of industry that will give us a sense of accomplishment from our daily labors.

### **A Temple of God**

There is another required course. It is entitled "Know Ye Not That Ye Are the Temple of God? 140."

Again there is the example of another one of the great prophets of the Old Testament, Daniel. During the period of time in which he lived, Israel was not faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord. Because of this she lost her power and was not able to defend herself against her enemies.

Strategically, she was in an awkward position. The powerful nations of Egypt and Syria bordered her on the south and on the north. Instead of doing battle on their own lands, these two nations took turns overrunning Israel and making her their battleground.

It was under these conditions that Daniel was born. When he was just a child, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, besieged Jerusalem. As part of the spoils of his conquest, he took the sacred vessels from the holy temple back as trophies. Then, in order to make his nation still stronger, he took hostage all of the bright and promising Israelite children. As the scriptures record, the king took those

*Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. [Daniel 1:4]*

Daniel was one of those taken back to the palace as a slave by Nebuchadnezzar, to be trained in the king's way and used to help make the empire stronger.

It was not long after Daniel had been taken from his home in Jerusalem that he faced his first real test. The young men of Israel had been apportioned a daily provision of the king's food, consisting of meat and wine.

Daniel knew in his heart, because of the training of his parents, that the food and the wine provided by the king would not be good for him. He knew it would defile his body. So he went to the prince who was over them and pleaded with him that he not be required to eat the meat and drink the wine of the king. The prince was astonished at this request. He did not dare allow Daniel the privilege of eating anything other than that the king had ordered. He was afraid he would lose his position, or perhaps, even his life, if the king found out. Daniel understood this, but he had been taught

correct principles. He bargained with the prince this way: He would eat only the foods he had been taught were good for him for just ten days. If after ten days his countenance was not fairer and healthier than all the rest, he would then eat the king's portion of meat and drink the wine.

Of course, because Daniel followed the Lord's way, at the end of the tenth day he was the strongest of all those taken before the king.

You have been taught that your body is a temple of God, and you are to treat it as such. Sometimes you may be ridiculed and laughed at for refusing to partake of those things that will destroy your body. We challenge you to remember that just as Daniel of old received strength by obeying the Lord's commandments, you will too, and will be blessed in the same way.

### **Completing Your Degree**

The Lord's laws are eternal. Just as sure as we follow them, we will receive his blessings. For he has promised us that

*All saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health . . . ;*

*. . . wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;*

*And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint. [D&C 89:18–20]*

Thumbing through the catalog beyond the basic required courses that begin with 100, we find an overwhelming selection of courses with numbers 200, 300, 400, 500, etc. The University of Mortality is going to offer us an abundance of electives to bring beauty into life and opportunities to improve talents. There will be courses offered in helping us improve our application for the cultural arts, music, paintings, dance, and drama. There is a large section on career choices that will give us variety in the work-a-day world. Yes, and there is even one

section on the characteristics to look for in our selection of an eternal companion, the most important choice we will make while attending the University of Mortality.

Of course, no university experience could be complete without periods of examination to test our progress toward the degree of our choice. A pattern of earthly ordinances has been established. The completion of these ordinances is required to qualify us for the highest degree offered. Before being allowed to participate in an ordinance, we will be required to sit in front of a priesthood leader and be tested on our faith, testimony, and obedience to gospel principles. A true record of our responses will be made and will become a permanent part of our requirements for graduation. A record will be made of the integrity of our responses to a priesthood leader before passing the test of having the ordinances of baptism, confirmation, gifts of the priesthood, and those ordinances performed in the holy temples.

The honest completion of each one entitles us to move forward on the next step toward our celestial degree. The failure to pass any one of the required tests will, of necessity, reduce us to a lower, less-wanted degree. However, the university does recognize the possibility of failure in an examination. There is a process of repentance, correction, and the opportunity again of redirecting our course toward the highest objective. Make-up tests will be allowed. There is, of course, the resulting sorrow that comes from failure, the recognition that extra effort must be exerted to make up for lost time, and the struggle and need for a new determination to get us back on course.

### **Here and Now**

It is now 1988. You are presently enrolled in the University of Mortality, having arrived here without knowledge of the decisions you made in the premortal existence. In fact, you find yourself enrolled in one of the most exciting, challenging semesters of your entire earthly

experience. It is the semester when many of the most important decisions in mortality must be made. The balance of your life here and in the eternities to come will depend on the decisions you make now. Your future happiness depends on these decisions. They are, of course, educational goals, career paths, talent enhancement, marriage, and the degree you want to obtain in this life to wear gloriously and proudly in the eternities to come.

We challenge you to study and internalize the basic required courses for life with the promise that conducting yourself in harmony with the Lord's law will bring the only true, fulfilling, and rewarding happiness that this

experience in the University of Mortality can produce.

Our Eternal Father stands ready to bless you. He will not forsake you, so long as you do not forsake him. Even then, he is willing to extend a helping hand to those who honestly and sincerely repent and strive to do the works of righteousness.

May God bless you with the strength of spirit to choose wisely the values by which you will govern your life, and may he bless you with the courage and commitment to stand steadfast in keeping the commandments of the Lord. This is my prayer, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.