

Beautiful Babies Blessing the World

PAUL V. JOHNSON

I am very grateful to be with you today, and I pray that we can have an edifying time together.

“A Host of Heroes”

Frank W. Boreham was an English Baptist preacher who spent years in New Zealand and Australia. Let me share a quote of his that I love. He was writing about the events during the Napoleonic Wars in the early part of the nineteenth century. He wrote:

*Men were following, with bated breath, the march of Napoleon, and waiting with feverish impatience for the latest news of the wars. And all the while, in their own homes, babies were being born. But who could think about **babies**? Everybody was thinking about **battles**. . . . In one year, . . . between Trafalgar and Waterloo, there stole into the world a host of heroes! . . . [In] 1809, . . . Gladstone was born at Liverpool; Alfred Tennyson was born at the Somersby rectory; and Oliver Wendell Holmes made his first appearance at Massachusetts. . . .*

Abraham Lincoln drew his first breath at Old Kentucky. Music was enriched by the advent of Frederic Chopin at Warsaw, and of Felix Mendelssohn at Hamburg. . . . Elizabeth Barrett Browning [from] Durham. . . . But nobody thought of babies. Everybody was thinking of battles. Yet . . . which of the battles of 1809 mattered more than the babies of 1809? . . .

. . . We fancy that God can only manage His world by big battalions . . . , when all the while He is doing it by beautiful babies. . . . When a wrong wants righting, or a work wants doing, or a truth wants preaching, or a continent wants opening, God sends a baby into the world to do it.¹

You are those beautiful babies who were born not long ago and who are now ready to right wrongs, do God’s work, preach the truth, and make a difference in the world.

In President Russell M. Nelson’s landmark talk to young adults last May, he explained one of the fundamental truths that would help you prepare for your future course:

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First, know the truth about who you are. . . .

Because there is a grand plan of salvation authored by Heavenly Father, does it not stand to reason that you also have a divine destiny?

*Make no mistake about it: Your potential is divine. With your diligent seeking, God will give you glimpses of who you may become.*²

God taught Moses this fundamental truth clearly when He told him, “Thou art my son”³ and “I have a work for thee.”⁴ When Moses faced the challenge of the adversary, he began to fear, but, “calling upon God, he received strength.”⁵ Can you feel or imagine that clear message from God coming to you as He lovingly says, “Thou art my daughter” or “Thou art my son” and “I have a work for thee to do”? We also know that when we face challenges and relentless pressure from the adversary, we can call upon God and receive strength.

So how will you, the beautiful babies of some years ago, go forward to bless the people of the world? The greatest impact comes as we move forward with faith—keeping our covenants in order to receive His direction and His power, submitting to His will, and letting God prevail.⁶

I do not know what the Lord has in store for you individually—what specific things you will do to make a difference in this world. Some in this audience will be leaders in science, medicine, the arts, technology, education, business, government, law, and other disciplines. Most of us will not be famous or prominent but will still have ample opportunity to make a difference in the world and be instruments the Lord can use in His work.

The Unsung Heroic Tasks of Earth Life

Although we do not know their names, countless individuals have changed the course of history. For example, think of the relatively small group of people who saved the Nephites in a precarious time of war when it looked like the nation would succumb to its enemies. We don’t know the name of even one of these individuals who saved the nation, but we do know them as the mothers of the stripling warriors. These mothers taught their children so well that their sons received

miraculous intervention and protection when they fought. These sons did “not doubt [their] mothers knew it.”⁷

Think about the faithful rank-and-file members of the Church who keep their covenants, follow the Lord’s direction, love others, and bless countless lives. Individually they are not widely known in the world, but their influence is immense. This group carries the bulk of the heavy lifting in the mortal part of the Lord’s vast work.

Think of ancestors of yours who were never prominent in the world but who were instrumental in blessing many lives. My mother’s parents were Swiss converts who had immigrated to the United States. My grandmother, Amalie, had bone tuberculosis as a young woman about your age and was very grateful to be healed after several years of suffering. Even after she had been cured of the disease, she had misshapen feet that caused a pronounced limp and also had scars from the sores on her arms, legs, and neck.

When she received the healing blessing, she was told she could fulfill her life’s mission. She said, “What it was I don’t know, but I always wanted to get married and was fond of children and wanted children of my own so bad.”⁸

Amalie was able to meet a fellow convert who was also committed to the Lord, and they were sealed.

My grandmother talked about the births of their first three children. She said, “On June 27, 1916, our first son, Enoch, was born, which made me very, very happy.”⁹ But Enoch died when he was six years old. About the next two children, my grandmother wrote, “Our second son was born 8 October 1919. He was very strong and healthy. We named him Aaron George. In 1922 on January 2, Winifred was born. It was a terrible blow to us.”¹⁰

Winifred is my mother. My grandmother did go on to explain why they were disappointed. She continued, “It was a terrible blow to us because we wanted to raise at least six boys for missionaries to pay back what the missionaries had done for us.”¹¹

Unlike today, at that time there were very few sister missionaries. My grandparents’ focus was on blessing others the way they had been blessed

with the gospel. They did go on to have one more daughter, Leah.

Now of course my grandparents loved my mother. When she was born, my grandparents were just unable to see into the future and know that my mother would have eight children of her own (six of them boys), fifty-five grandchildren, and, at last count, 190 great-grandchildren. My grandparents wanted missionaries and ended up with many through my mother, who also served a mission with my father. Seven of her children, thirty-five of her grandchildren, and twelve in the first wave of the oldest great-grandchildren have served or are currently serving as missionaries. My mother was one of those beautiful babies who God sent to help bless the world.

My mother had many feelings of inadequacy as a young girl. She came from a family poorer than those of many of her friends, and she felt her clothing and situation didn't measure up to that of those around her. Some of these feelings of inadequacy followed her throughout her life, but she moved forward in spite of these feelings. After college she attended a graduate school that specialized in child development and mother education. The philanthropist who endowed the school, Lizzie Merrill Palmer, stated, "I hold profoundly the conviction that the welfare of any community is divinely, and hence inseparably, dependent upon the quality of its motherhood and the spirit and character of its homes."¹²

My mother seemed to take this to heart. She taught child development at two universities and then married and spent her life trying to use what she had learned to raise her own children. But reality is much messier than theory, and we gave her a run for her money.

Her life as a mother was challenging, rewarding, and at times discouraging. She wrote:

Every mother needs a hiding place where she can have some peace and solitude. We had a big closet under the stairs [in our home. It was] a wonderful place of peace where no one ever thought to look for me and where I always kept some good reading material.¹³

My mother also told of a conversation with my sister. She related:

Kathy said to me when she was a little girl, "Do you think we could choose our mothers before we came here?"

And I said, "Do you think we could, Kathy?"

Kathy said, "I don't think so, or I would have chosen Aunt Leah."¹⁴

My mother was also open about the great blessings that come from being a parent. Think about the constant effort and challenge for mothers and fathers "to rear their children in love and righteousness."¹⁵ Much of this effort is behind the scenes and not glamorous, but it is vital to the Lord's work. It is one of the unsung heroic tasks of earth life. I am guessing the Lamb's book of life is more important than the world's recording of history. We can live so that we are grateful rather than nervous that "angels above us are silent notes taking!"¹⁶

You who will have the chance to marry and have children will find that raising your own children is challenging, but I am confident that you will find eternally significant ways to help prepare these babies born into your homes for their important work. Many people don't have the blessing to grow up in a strong, gospel-centered home, but you can make sure your children do.

In the later years of my parents' lives, we recorded some of their reflections as they looked back over their lives. Listen to my mother's thoughts of being raised by parents who were thoroughly converted [an audio clip was played]:

They were truly converted to the gospel, and they were such an inspiration to other people and certainly to me. I just grew up with the idea that the gospel and the Church were the center of your lives. I never remember doubting the truthfulness of the gospel, and I'm sure that's because of the home I was raised in.

My father, who was also blessed with faithful parents, reflected on testimony [an audio clip was played]:

I think a testimony is what you believe, and what you believe is what you perform, and what you perform makes you what you are. I've never seen anything in my nearly eighty years of life that Christ taught that

I've been able to fault. And I don't know of any other thing that I know that's that constant. And so if we have as our model Christ and His teachings and try to mature in them and perform in them, that's the best thing we can do.

As we go forward in faith, we will all face challenges. Those challenges are different for each generation, but no matter what is happening around us, we can fulfill our destiny and do the work the Lord wants us to do.

My parents' generation faced their own challenges. They grew up during the Depression. My father received his mission call the last week in November 1941, about a week before Pearl Harbor was attacked. He entered the mission field soon after the United States had entered the war and then joined the military after his mission and some schooling. My mother's college graduation was three days before the D-Day invasion of Normandy. But in the midst of challenges, Saints move forward with faith.

Think of the societal and cultural situation in the waning days of the Nephites described in the Book of Mormon. Mormon and his family—and whatever few followers of righteousness were left—must have been under tremendous pressure to abandon their beliefs. The situation was dire. Mormon sadly described to Moroni the degenerate state the people were in. He wrote:

*O the depravity of my people! They are without order and without mercy. . . .
And they have become strong in their perversion. . . .
Behold, my son, I cannot recommend them unto God. . . .
But behold, my son, I recommend thee unto God.¹⁷*

Moroni stood apart from the societal ills that had infected almost everyone else. Years before, Moroni had been just a baby born into a society that was spiraling downward. God used that baby to accomplish a task much more important than the battles being fought at the time. Think of him facing life-threatening opposition to his task of finalizing the writing, compiling, abridging, and preserving of the records. For his safety and to safeguard the records, this work had to be done in

secret. Imagine how much worry, time, and work was involved in this task. And for all that effort, not one person read the record for 1,400 years. Yet how can we measure the influence of his work since it has come to light?

We can choose to walk in faith even in very challenging times when it seems difficult to see how things will work out—especially when things don't go according to our thoughts, plans, and desires. But it is God's work, and if we follow Him, we will be able to bless others and receive blessings in our own lives. We lay our efforts on the altar and allow the Lord to do what He will with them. And as we do, He changes us and helps us fulfill our mission and our destiny.

In 1833, an ancestor, Truman, and his young wife, Polly, embraced the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and were baptized. Truman came from a very troubled home with an abusive father. But then he and Polly started their own gospel-centered family. They moved to Kirtland, Ohio, to be with the Saints, and since Truman was a carpenter—a joiner—he worked on the interior of the Kirtland Temple.

In 1836 Truman was ordained a seventy:

Since this position involved special responsibility for missionary work, he began preparations for a mission while remaining busy with construction work. When the Prophet Joseph approached him about building a store, Truman replied that he "was about to go out into the vineyard to preach." The Prophet told him to go ahead but apparently reconsidered his need for the skilled carpenter and returned with his counselors the next day to renew the request. Truman records the conversation in his autobiography:

"The next day I looked up and saw the Presidency of the Church together. I dropped my head and continued to work. At this time a voice seemed to whisper to me, 'It is your duty to build that house for President Smith.' And while I was meditating upon it, I looked up and Brother Joseph Smith was close to me. He said, 'It is your duty to build that house.' I answered, 'I know it.' Accordingly, I changed my determination and yielded obedience."¹⁸

I wonder how things might have been different if this young man had pushed to do what he

had planned to do rather than submitting to what the Lord had in store for him. This man's name was Truman O. Angell. He eventually became the architect for the Church and designed the Salt Lake Temple, along with many other structures from that time period. As with Truman, if we allow the Lord to guide us, He can lead us in directions where we can be most useful.

“Because of Him”

One of our daughters shared thoughts she had developed for a Sunday School lesson about how we grow through challenging situations.

She referenced Romans 8:

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. . . .

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . .

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.¹⁹

Our daughter then laid out her thoughts:

*No virtue can grow in the absence of its opposite.
Courage can't develop if there's nothing to fear.
Patience can't be cultivated unless we face
frustration.*

*Peacemakers can't exist unless there is contention.
Virtue can't develop unless we face and resist
temptation.*

*We can't exercise faith unless we have reason
to doubt.*

We can't prove loyalty without turning down enticing alternatives.

Charity means nothing if we have no enemies to extend it to.²⁰

We receive direction and power when we align ourselves with God's will. Submitting our will to His is the ultimate and most difficult test we face in life. The Savior “came into the world to do the will of [the] Father,”²¹ and drinking of the bitter cup that the Father gave Him²² was His most challenging task. Yet think of the result of His

willingness to do this. He made possible all the effects of His Atonement for our blessing.

I want to repeat the last part of the Frank Boreham quote I used at the beginning of this talk and add a sentence at the end that I left off previously:

We fancy that God can only manage His world by big battalions . . . , when all the while He is doing it by beautiful babies. . . . When a wrong wants righting, or a work wants doing, or a truth wants preaching, or a continent wants opening, God sends a baby into the world to do it. That is why, long, long ago, a babe was born at Bethlehem.²³

Oh, how grateful we are for that beautiful baby!

I remember an Easter video that the Church released several years ago. It had visuals and music accompanied by simple text on the screen. I would like to quote the text from that video:

*It was unthinkable
Impossible
Unfathomable
Unprecedented
A single act that changed history
Possibility
Destiny
He was a carpenter
A teacher
An outcast
A leader
Yet He did what no carpenter, teacher, outcast, leader
had ever done
Like all who preceded Him
He lived
And He died
But unlike all who preceded Him
He rose from the dead
He lived again
He lives
And because He lives
You, you, and you and she and he and they and we
All will live again
Because of Him
Death has no sting
The grave no victory*

*We can start again and again and again
Because of Him
Guilt becomes peace
Regret becomes relief
Despair becomes hope
Because of Him
We have second chances
Clean slates
New beginnings
There is no such thing as the end
Because of Him*²⁴

I pray for you: you who not many years ago were the babies being born without much worldly fanfare and who are now ready to bless the world. I invite you to stay close to the Lord so that He can help unlock your full potential. I know you have the gifts necessary to make a difference, to bless people, and to accomplish critical things for the kingdom. But my confidence in the future and in you is because of Him. Because of Him, you will have the inspiration, the power, and the path to bless others and accomplish things beyond what your innate abilities would allow. Because of Him, you will be powerful instruments who He will utilize to shape the future. Because of Him, you will have access to the eternal blessings you desire.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Frank W. Boreham, *Mountains in the Mist: Some Australian Reveries* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1919), 166–67, 169; emphasis in original.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022.
3. Moses 1:4.
4. Moses 1:6.
5. Moses 1:20.
6. See Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign*, November 2020.
7. Alma 56:48.

8. Amalie Hollenweger Amacher, in “Life Story of Amalie Hollenweger Amacher Recorded by Veoma Stahle” (also titled “Amalia Hollenweger Amacher Life Story—Told to Veoma Stahle”), Amalia Hollenweger [Amacher] (18 May 1886–2 October 1965), Memories section, familysearch.org.

9. Amacher, “Life Story of Amalie.”

10. Amalie Hollenweger Amacher, in “Amalia Hollenweger Amacher—Short Autobiography,” Amalia Hollenweger [Amacher], Memories section, familysearch.org.

11. Amacher, “Amalia—Short Autobiography.”

12. Will of Lizzie Merrill Palmer providing for the establishment of the Merrill-Palmer School in Detroit, Michigan, dated May 17, 1916, ninth paragraph.

13. “Talks by Winifred A. Johnson,” comp. Kathleen Johnson Thatcher (1980), 10; in author’s personal collection.

14. “Talks by Winifred A. Johnson.”

15. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” (23 September 1995).

16. “Do What Is Right,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 237.

17. Moroni 9:18–19, 21–22.

18. Paul L. Anderson, “Truman O. Angell: Architect and Saint,” in *Supporting Saints: Life Stories of Nineteenth-Century Mormons*, ed. Donald Q. Cannon and David J. Whittaker (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1985), 139–40; quoting Truman O. Angell, “Autobiography of Truman Osborn Angell, Sr., in His Own Hand”; punctuation and capitalization modernized.

19. Romans 8:18, 35, 37.

20. Kirsten Mower, personal email.

21. 3 Nephi 27:13.

22. See 3 Nephi 11:11.

23. Boreham, *Mountains in the Mist*, 169.

24. *Because of Him—Easter Video*, video, “Because of Him” initiative, 13 April 2014, Media Library, Church of Jesus Christ, churchofjesuschrist.org/media/video/2020-02-4100-because-of-him-easter-video.