

Magnifying Our Precious Gift of Time

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My dear brothers and sisters, it is wonderful to be with you today. A little over forty-two years ago, I began my first semester at BYU. Ever since then I have been Cougar blue through and through! I love this place! I have brought my family back to campus on many occasions, and they love it too. My only regret is that the Cougar Tail wasn't a thing while I was here. But I have made up for lost time over the last several years. I would have never dreamed that one day I would address the students of my alma mater. I am certainly "one of the least of these."¹ I hope you will never take for granted the great blessing of being here.

I was thrilled when I was accepted to study at BYU. I considered it an absolute privilege to be associated with some of the Church's best and brightest. Several of our children have also studied here at BYU. They were a little competitive about their ACT scores. I am always quick to remind them that my score was 35. I know—amazing, right?! A 17 the first time and an 18 the second time.

Like many of you, my missionary service changed the course of my life. For one thing, it was probably the main reason I chose to apply to BYU. But more importantly, missionary service planted my feet firmly on the covenant path. I came to know deeply that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that this is His Church, led by His servants, the prophets; and that He and the Father appeared to the boy Joseph Smith. I came to know, in a very personal way, that the Book of Mormon is ancient scripture, translated by the gift and power of God. The things I learned and experienced on my mission have blessed my entire life. If you have served a mission, I hope you are maintaining your holy habits and righteous routines. If you haven't yet served a mission, young men, please make it a priority to prepare yourself to do so. Sisters, seek to understand if the Lord would have you serve.

Because my mission language was French, I was hired as a student teacher of entry-level French classes here at BYU. In fact, it was in one

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of these classes that I met my future wife, Lucia. I will never forget when she walked into my classroom in the JKHB on the first day of class. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. I was super disappointed to find out she wasn't actually enrolled in my class.

Back then, in order to add a class, you had to get the teacher to sign a card. At the end of class, about twenty students came to the front of the room wanting to add my French 101 class. Lucia was at the very back of the group. Fortunately I have very long arms, so I reached over about three rows of hopeful students, grabbed Lucia's card, signed it, and handed it back to her. Some of the other students were not pleased with my overreach.

Before dating Lucia, I thought it would be a good idea to seek approval from the department chairman. When I asked him if it was okay to date a girl in one of my classes, he simply replied, "Isn't that what BYU is all about?!"

Now, it is not what BYU is *all* about, but for me it was right up there.

That signature and approval changed my life forever. We began dating and were sealed in the Oakland California Temple about a year later.

Guidance from the Lord

When I began my studies at BYU after my mission, I was pretty much set on becoming a teacher. My father and two of my brothers were teachers, so I thought that would be my path. I started in that direction with great anticipation. I completed a good number of classes in my major. Then, after a day of substitute teaching at a local high school, I felt like I should take another path. I dreaded the call to my parents to let them know I was changing my major. The problem was I had no idea what I was changing it to! Does that sound familiar to any of you?

I prayed and pondered and still had no idea what to do. The clock was ticking, and I knew I needed to get things figured out fairly soon so I didn't waste time and money.

Is God willing to give us guidance about something like what to study in college? I believe He is. I love what President Russell M. Nelson taught about revelation in his conference message

"Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives." I commend it to you for your diligent review and study. Here is one little bit of what he taught:

The privilege of receiving revelation is one of the greatest gifts of God to His children.

Through the manifestations of the Holy Ghost, the Lord will assist us in all our righteous pursuits.²

One day in the spring of 1982, I was walking across campus when I ran into a good friend who had served in my mission. I shared with him my dilemma and asked what he had decided to study. He said he was majoring in computer science. These were his exact words: "I hear this whole computer thing is going to be big!" How prophetic!

I don't know if there has ever been a more direct answer to the prayer of a very anxious soul. I immediately enrolled in computer science classes and began my studies.

My decision to follow that inspiration truly lifted me up and has been life-changing for me and my family.

However, I wouldn't say that God has told me exactly what to do in every circumstance. Some prayers for guidance have gone unanswered. In those cases, I determined the Lord trusted me enough to make the decision for myself, so I went forward with faith, always correcting my course as I went.

I have often counseled with people who were seeking revelation for their lives but were not willing to take a step forward without clear, specific direction from the Lord. I don't think revelation works that way. I am a firm believer that once we have prayed and sought the Lord's help, we need to get up and get moving.

Have you ever tried to turn the steering wheel of a parked car? It is very difficult. Once you start the engine and the power steering kicks in, it becomes much easier, yet you still aren't going anywhere. But think about what happens when you start moving forward: a slight movement of the steering wheel can move the car from one lane to the other with little effort. Course corrections are easier when you have some forward

momentum. So even when you are not quite sure what to do, start moving!

Remember Nephi's experience when he went into Jerusalem to retrieve the brass plates from Laban. He said:

I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do.

*Nevertheless I went forth.*³

So go forth, even when you are not quite sure what to do.

This year will mark my thirty-eighth year in the technology industry in Utah. I have been blessed to work with some of the most amazing people and some incredible companies! A lot of people think that great companies just happen. That may be true in a few cases, but most great companies are born out of a lot of blood, sweat, and tears, with more failures than successes. Building a business is a journey of ups and downs, twists and turns, excitement and disappointment. But it is a lot of fun. Staying grounded and focusing on the business fundamentals of hiring great employees, delighting customers, increasing revenues, managing expenses, and turning a profit are keys to success. Again, these things don't just happen. They require focus and discipline.

The Myth of Balance

I have told you about my missionary service, my marriage to Lucia, our family, my university studies, and my career. I share these things with you simply to make the point that we all have multiple demands on our time through the different seasons of life. Your loving Heavenly Father knows this, and He wants to help you succeed. He will give you appropriate guidance in all aspects of your life; you just have to trust Him enough to ask and then to act.

I have often been asked as a father, husband, Church leader, and business leader how I have been able to balance all of my responsibilities. That is a very good question. You may be wondering how you can balance everything too. Well, as Elder David A. Bednar once said, "Quit worrying about it because there's no such thing as balance. It doesn't exist."⁴ There is really no such thing as

perfect balance in life. In fact, I don't think *balance* is even the right word, because it implies that all aspects of our lives are getting an equal amount of attention. Not all aspects of our lives *deserve* an equal amount. And at different times and seasons, some aspects will need more attention than others.

So instead of seeking balance, it might be more helpful to identify the most important things and never let the lesser things take precedence over them. To quote Stephen R. Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."⁵

The Power of Time

Most people need about eight to ten hours of sleep every night—yes, even college students. That means we will have somewhere between fourteen and sixteen hours a day for life's pursuits. Remember the good old days when you were living at home and you only had a few things to worry about? At the time, those days may have seemed rather stressful, but compared to life now, they probably seem relatively simple.

Then, if you served a full-time mission, you had two things to do: sleep and missionary work. Unfortunately, some returned missionaries have stopped doing both.

For now, as a student your primary focus should be your education, but you also need to make time for the Lord, relationships, and having some fun. That doesn't seem like too much, does it? Okay, let's take it up a notch. Let's say you get married and the intensity of your schoolwork increases. Do you like to eat and live indoors? Better add a job. Now let's make it really fun: add a baby. After you graduate from BYU, add a demanding career, a few more children, and Church callings. Maybe even add becoming the president of BYU! Is anyone sweating right now? Most people on the stand are smiling and saying to themselves, "Been there, done that!"

Can you balance all of that all of the time? I am with Elder Bednar—it is not possible. But you *can* protect blocks of your available time and attention for the most important things. You can and you must! It just means that something will have to give. You will have to determine what that will be.

You may not believe it now, but someday you will look back and say, “I wish I was in college again. Life was so much simpler and easier to balance then.”

How is that possible? How can life become more complex and harder to balance in the future when you feel like you are at maximum capacity now?

The answer is that if you trust the Lord and draw on His strength, He will increase your maximum capacity. Consider these sacred promises and reassurances:

*Ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along.*⁶

*I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.*⁷

*And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that [you] should run faster than [you have] strength. And again, it is expedient that [you] should be diligent, that thereby [you] might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order.*⁸

It has been my experience that the Lord gives us just as much as we have the strength to handle, plus a little extra, so that we can increase our faith and strength. Just as with all of Heavenly Father’s creations, you were designed to grow and progress. You were not meant to stay the way you are. Change and improvement are built into your eternal DNA.

As your life changes and evolves, so should your view about your time and how you spend it. I have found that those who do not make adjustments to preserve the most important priorities often become frustrated and even resentful. Time is a precious gift given to you by your Heavenly Father. You have a sacred responsibility to manage it wisely.

Let me share with you an example from my own life.

A Course Correction

Ever since I can remember, I have enjoyed hunting. I went hunting as a young boy, as a teenager,

as a young adult before and after my mission, and even in the early years of our married life. I ate, drank, and slept hunting. I would spend countless hours preparing for hunting trips. Then, when hunting season arrived, it would consume most of my time off from work, taking me away from my family for days on end. When family, church, and work responsibilities increased, I did not adjust my life accordingly.

After a while, Lucia could sense something had to change. To her credit, she was very patient with me. I found out later that her greatest faith, hope, and prayers were that somehow Heavenly Father would help me see what was happening. One day He finally did.

That day came while I was on a hunting trip. I found myself alone with plenty of time to think. My mind immediately went to Lucia and our children. I had a revelatory realization of their importance in my life. I also realized that hunting was taking me away from them and from my opportunities to serve in the Church. While I was pondering these things, the Spirit whispered to my heart and mind that it was time to put aside hunting for a season.

I have to say, I was a bit stunned by the direct nature of this message from the Holy Ghost. I was so stunned that I immediately began to resist these feelings. I started to rationalize: Hunting was important to me. I have a right to pursue my interests. Anyway, a few hunting trips a year are not a big deal.

The Spirit softly but consistently countered those thoughts. I continued with my rebuttal: Why should I have to minimize something that was so near and dear to my heart? There had to be some middle ground, I thought.

And then these words came gently, but with great power, into my mind: “Jan, if you do not stop this, you will lose your family.”

My Enos-like “wrestle . . . before God” while I was “hunt[ing] beasts in the forests” allowed the Lord to change my heart.⁹

Well, I had already planned another trip for a couple of weeks later, so I decided to go. Once again I had some quiet time. And once again I found myself in a conversation with the Holy Ghost. It was very similar to the first one, except

this time I just listened with no rebuttal. Again I was warned that if I didn't push the pause button, I would lose my family. I knew what I had to do.

Upon returning from that trip, I sat down with Lucia and told her about my experience. I let her know this was not the right time of life to allow hunting to consume so much of my time. There were many more important things to do.

Then she said, "I have been praying that the Lord would help you see how this was affecting our family."

I am grateful for Lucia's gentle hand and her supplication to the Father on my behalf. I am also grateful for the Holy Ghost and His gentle yet direct way of helping me understand how important it was for me to put the important things first. To be clear, this is not about hunting. This is about anything that becomes a thief of our precious time and focus.

This is probably one of the most significant course corrections I have ever had to make in my life. I have to be honest: it was a little painful. But I am so glad I did it.

Make Time for What Is Most Important

There are three things that need your utmost attention as you go through life: the Lord, your family, and your work. Remember, you only have a certain number of hours available to you every day. The amount of time required by each of these important aspects of life will ebb and flow over time. Just make sure you keep the proper perspective on the important things. If you take care of those three things, usually everything else takes care of itself.

When I was called to serve as a counselor in a stake presidency, the presiding authority basically said, "We already know that you love the Lord and that you will serve Him. So your first priority should be your family; second, your career; and third, your calling. And if you ever wonder where your focus should be, remember who you are sealed to."

To be honest, I was a bit surprised at this counsel, but I was so grateful.

When Lucia and I were called as mission leaders, this same leader, knowing I am a type-A personality, counseled Lucia to be the barometer in

our marriage and family life. He told her, "When Jan gets out of balance with all that is going on in the mission, gently remind him when you and the children need him at home."

This has been a blessing as I have served in various callings in the Church, and this principle can be applied to life in general.

"Think Celestial"

President Nelson recently taught:

*My brothers and sisters, I plead with you to make time for the Lord! Make your own spiritual foundation firm and able to stand the test of time by doing those things that allow the Holy Ghost to be with you *always*.*¹⁰

So what does it look like "to make time for the Lord"? I would counsel you not to overthink this. It is not complicated. This verse from the Doctrine and Covenants reveals that great blessings can come from simple things done consistently:

*Be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great.*¹¹

Get to know what is important to the Lord and make those things important to you. Really, that is just another way to state President Nelson's very simple counsel to "think celestial!"¹²

Satan will do anything he can to monopolize our time and misdirect our efforts away from the things of greatest importance. He tempts us to displace our most important blessings with a mess—and I emphasize *mess*—of pottage.¹³

The Dead See Scroll

Take social media, for example—or, as I like to call it, the Dead See Scroll. Social media lures us into endless scrolling through nothingness. We see other people living supposedly normal lives, but it is often a façade, devoid of life. You know how the Dead Sea works: living water enters and nothing comes from it. Social media is much like that. We so often put in our time and attention and nothing of value comes out. We can often lose ourselves in this salty sea, void of life, that drains

us of our self-worth, robs us of our purpose, and effortlessly floats us away in its toxic brine.

You might say that I am being too hard on social media. After all, many of the leaders of the Church have social media accounts, including me. But notice how they use social media. Their purpose is to inspire us to think a little deeper and a little more purely. I believe their hope is to extricate us from this meaningless Dead Sea Scroll and to help us seek something higher and holier.

So the question to ask ourselves is this: Is social media—or anything else for that matter—helping me think celestial? Or is it dragging me into terrestrial or telectual thinking? Is it helping me make what is important to God important to me? Or is it displacing important things with trivial things? May I suggest that the next time you get caught up in the Dead Sea Scroll, just pause and think celestial. Then click on the Gospel Library app and read from the Book of Mormon or listen to a general conference talk. I promise a new light will come into your life as you drink from living waters.

The Influence of the Holy Ghost

President Nelson warned, “In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁴

As you make time for the Lord, your ability to discern and understand the things of the Spirit will increase substantially. This will enable you to know the things of most worth to you and your family. Knowing the voice of the Spirit will help you as you seek to know the will of the Lord for your life. I hope you will remember the power of forward momentum. Keep moving! Keep pressing forward with faith even when you are not quite sure what to do. As Alma taught, “Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.”¹⁵

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, it has been wonderful to spend some time with you today. I hope some of the things I said will help you as you navigate the use of your precious time here on earth. I love

you! I see in you a divine nature. The torch of the ongoing Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ will be passed to you in order to prepare a people to receive the Savior when He comes again. I pray you will take this torch and add to it the brightness of your individual testimony.

I testify of the divinity of the Father’s plan. As you effectively manage your allotted time here on earth, you will be able to play a powerful role in the building of His kingdom. We are His children. He loves us so much that He sent His Only Begotten Son to be our Savior and Redeemer. His greatest desire is that we return to live with Him. I love the Savior’s merciful heart. He is anxious to forgive those who will simply repent and come to Him. So run to repentance daily. It will allow you to find peace and joy in this life. I am also eternally grateful for the Holy Ghost, whose voice I have come to know. This knowledge has blessed my life, and it will bless yours. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Matthew 25:40.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018.
3. 1 Nephi 4:6–7; emphasis added.
4. David A. Bednar, “‘Plates’ Object Lesson,” Facebook, 19 April 2021, facebook.com/davida.bednar/videos/316563470106033.
5. Stephen R. Covey; for example, section 2 of Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).
6. Doctrine and Covenants 78:18.
7. 2 Nephi 28:30.
8. Mosiah 4:27.
9. Enos 1:2–3.
10. Russell M. Nelson, “Make Time for the Lord,” *Liahona*, November 2021; emphasis in original.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 64:33.
12. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!” *Liahona*, November 2023.
13. See Genesis 25:29–34.
14. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church.”
15. Alma 32:21.