

Can You Imagine?

EVAN A. SCHMUTZ

Thank you, President Reese, for such a warm welcome to the university and for your very kind introduction.

I am a little nervous to be with you this morning. Very grateful, but nervous nonetheless. It seems like a dream to be here. I was a freshman in 1972—fifty-two years ago. I attended many devotionals in this building, just as you do. As a young student, neither I nor anyone who knew me—except my mom—could ever have imagined that a day would come when I would stand at this pulpit and speak.

In my freshman year, President Dallin H. Oaks was in his second year as president of this university. That year President Oaks taught his first and only Book of Mormon class—or so I have been told by him. I had the good fortune of being a student in that class.

To my chagrin, as incredible as that experience was—to be taught by President Oaks—one

memory stands out. One day at the conclusion of class, he asked me to stay and visit. My hair was a fair bit longer than the standards allowed.

Looking kindly into my face, President Oaks said, “Brother Schmutz, I can’t help noticing that some of your classmates are wondering if the president of the university is going to say anything to you about the length of your hair. I would rather not. Can you take it from here?”

I nodded.

At the next class I had a new look and a new love for my president. President Oaks continues to encourage and kindly invite better behavior.

My youthful inability to imagine standing at this pulpit to deliver a devotional message touches on a theme I want to explore with you this morning.

I pray we will have eyes to see and ears to hear what the Lord wishes to tell us.¹ As impressions come, be mindful to follow them. God will strengthen us in our efforts, “grace for grace.”²

Evan A. Schmutz, a General Authority Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on February 13, 2024.

Three Immutable Truths Young Adults Should Keep in Mind

In May 2022, President Russell M. Nelson spoke from the Conference Center to young adults. The talk is entitled “Choices for Eternity.” Please study it. It is just for you!

President Nelson said that there are

three major truths that are rarely addressed:

1. *First, each of us is going to die.*
2. *Second, because of Jesus Christ, each of us is going to be resurrected and become immortal.*
3. *And third, Judgment Day is ahead for each of us.*³

When we die, “as soon as [we] are departed from this mortal body, . . . whether [we] be good or evil,”⁴ we enter “the great world of the spirits of the dead,”⁵ where “the spirits of those who are righteous are received into . . . [the] paradise” of God.⁶ These will rise in the morning of the first resurrection.⁷ “And then cometh the judgment.”⁸ It is only in the resurrected state that we can “receive a fulness of joy.”⁹ The Holy One of Israel will be our judge.¹⁰ “He cannot be deceived.”¹¹

President Nelson gave his reason for sharing these three immutable but seldom discussed truths with the young adults of the Church. He said:

*My purpose tonight is to make sure that your eyes are wide open to the truth that this life really **is** the time when you get to decide what kind of life **you** want to live forever. Now **is** your time “to prepare to meet God.”¹²*

Note that this right to choose comes with conditions. We do not draw out a lucky number and get to pick our kingdom like the prize behind the curtain of a game show. We must “abide” by the required laws and conditions.¹³ Our “kingdom choosing” is tied to our “commandment keeping.”

My purpose this morning is to help you understand true doctrine and establish practices in your lives that, if followed, will improve your ability to imagine meeting God and receiving the kingdom of glory He has prepared for you. When we exercise faith to believe in such a kingdom, diligently learn all we can about it, and imagine our own

place in that kingdom, we will more effectively pursue it with faith and fervor through the days of our lives.

We love you! We want you to find “peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come.”¹⁴ We are grateful for your faithfulness and astonished at the strength of this generation of Latter-day Saints. You are not like the rest of the world!

But a word of caution: When you are in the bloom and vibrancy of young adulthood, death can seem too far off to think about. It is easy to observe in the world around us that most people have little concern with death, resurrection, and judgment—and, therefore, little concern for connecting the way we live in this life to the reward we will receive in the next. However, that connection is absolute and unavoidable.

God expects us to be intentional with our mortality.¹⁵ “Remember, . . . to be spiritually-minded is life eternal.”¹⁶

Can You Imagine?

A few years ago, my wife and I enjoyed a heartwarming little film entitled *I Can Only Imagine*. The story is sweet, wholesome, and inspiring. Some of you may have seen it. The movie was inspired by the life of a young man who wrote a beautiful song of joy by the same name, anticipating a moment when he would be with Jesus at the end of his life.¹⁷

We could discuss small differences in our doctrinal understanding of the beautiful day when we are brought into the presence of Jesus Christ, but we certainly do share the feelings of joyful anticipation and imagining displayed in the lyrics and music of that song.

This is not the first time we have been asked to imagine that culminating moment. In Alma 5, the prophet gave a timeless sermon filled with inspired questions. Many of them are worthy of your deepest consideration and self-evaluation.

But this morning I want to focus on two of Alma’s questions that invite us to “imagine.” Please, be like Nephi—liken these scriptures to yourselves,¹⁸ imagining you were there in the audience, listening intently to the great prophet Alma:

*Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality . . . to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?*¹⁹

Isn't that a supremely consequential question? If you really ponder, it will stop you in your tracks. To "look forward" to an event suggests a happy anticipation of what is to come. To "look forward with an eye of faith" in the things God has revealed is choosing to believe with such intensity that we will do whatever is required to receive or achieve it.

I am reminded of President Nelson's counsel:

*When you reach up for the Lord's power in your life with the same intensity that a drowning person has when . . . gasping for air, power from Jesus Christ will be yours.*²⁰

President Nelson is asking us to imagine, isn't he?

Similarly, if we believe with the same intensity in the promise that Jesus has "prepared a house for [us] . . . among the mansions of [our] Father,"²¹ we will more earnestly attend to the day-to-day business of righteousness! I promise we will be supported in our efforts, for faith—as a principle of power—is a gift from God that will follow from our righteous actions.²²

Many here are returned missionaries and know the power of asking inspired questions. Inspired questions invite personal engagement and productive self-evaluation. Inspired questions invite the Holy Ghost into the heart of the hearer. Inspired questions prepare people to act on the invitations given them.

With that in mind, listen to Alma's next inspired question:

*Can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?*²³

Can you imagine the overwhelming joy, humility, gratitude, and love that will consume your soul when Jesus Christ, the Merciful Redeemer,

speaks to you by name and says, "Come unto me ye blessed"? This will be the ultimate, transcendent, incomparable moment of inclusion and belonging. Don't be deceived by the voices of the world. That ultimate, celestial belonging is not freely given to all of God's children. It is freely offered, but the gift of eternal life is reserved for those who accept the offer by keeping covenants made in the house of the Lord.²⁴

The story of Jesus appearing to the more righteous Nephites after His Resurrection evokes a visual experience akin to what this ultimate meeting with Jesus may be like:

*And they did all, both they who had been healed and they who were whole, bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and . . . did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears.*²⁵

Can you imagine?

Our ability to visualize God's reward for the faithful will diminish or increase in direct proportion to our obedience, our covenant keeping, and our willingness to keep Jesus Christ at the center of our lives.

I am confident Alma intended his questions to awaken in his hearers a personal response, a need for self-evaluation, and a consuming commitment to learn and do everything necessary to experience that moment. Have they awakened such feelings in you?

Don't be discouraged! Take heart. Please don't negatively compare where you are today with where others may be in their lives. Even the senior leaders of the Church, as well as prophets in ancient days, were refined by their struggles and mistakes because they persisted with faith in Christ.²⁶ Progress is pleasing to the Lord.

Look to our prophets and apostles for example and counsel; look to the women and men who have been called to lead the Church. No matter the current condition of our spiritual lives, Jesus invites us to come to Him in faith, to repent, to receive the ordinances of the priesthood and the companionship of the Holy Ghost, and to covenant to continue in His way. This is the doctrine of Christ.

Repentance with faith in Christ opens windows of opportunity in our lives through which the Lord pours out His blessings.

Some years ago, in my earliest days as a General Authority, I was given an opportunity to accompany and observe President M. Russell Ballard as he officiated at a sealing in the Salt Lake Temple. President Ballard knew the groom’s family. The couple being sealed appeared to be in their late thirties, and one or both had been previously married.

Before we went into the sealing room, President Ballard told me not to expect many words from him, saying, “It is hard to offer more truth or eloquence than the words of the ordinance themselves.”

During the sealing, President Ballard shared a single scripture: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”²⁷

As President Ballard recited this scripture, the groom became visibly emotional. Tears began to run down his cheeks. Following the sealing, as the company began to reverently express their love to the couple and file out of the sealing room, a man quietly came to me and informed me he was the groom’s best friend. In a whisper, he asked if I had noticed the groom’s emotion.

As I nodded, the man continued: “Will you please let President Ballard know that for reasons I don’t have time to tell you, the scripture he recited has been instrumental in the groom’s long and difficult return to faith and worthiness to be in the temple today? To hear President Ballard quote that scripture was a confirmation from heaven that God is pleased with him.”

As President Ballard and I walked from the sealing room, I told him of my conversation. He stopped, thought for a moment, and, smiling softly, said, “I had not planned to use that scripture. Now I know why it came to me.”

Each of us is in our own season of life. Individual experiences within the Lord’s plan for His children can be very different from person to person. But His plan of happiness will always be grounded on the invitation to come to Christ, to repent, and to partake of His Atonement through making covenants with Him.

Let’s discuss some personal habits and practices you might more intentionally incorporate into your lives as you prepare for a joyful return to your heavenly home.

1. Make Time to Be in the House of the Lord

I am guessing that most of you have been endowed in the temple. I am grateful for all who are here, and I speak to all. If you have not yet been endowed, I invite you to prepare.²⁸ Start wherever you are. Include your bishop in your preparations.

The experience in the house of the Lord is a very personal experience. In the house of the Lord we imagine hearing the voice of God inviting us to receive our inheritance in His kingdom.²⁹

In the house of the Lord we are taught the plan of salvation and the essential role of Jesus Christ in the plan.

Our minds are turned back to the Creation. We learn of the necessity of the Fall of Adam and Eve and the need for the Atonement of Christ. We are pointed forward to the glorious end and eternal destiny God has prepared for us. We are shown what is required of us in mortality, in the here and now, to qualify for the gift of eternal life. And we are invited to covenant that we will do what is required.

President Howard W. Hunter once shared the amazement that Elder John A. Widtsoe experienced from learning in the house of the Lord and imagining where he fit in the plan:

*The mighty perspective of eternity is unraveled before us in the holy temples; we see time from its infinite beginning to its endless end; and the drama of eternal life is unfolded before us. Then I see more clearly my place amidst the things of the universe, my place among the purposes of God; I am better able to place myself where I belong.*³⁰

Learning in the house of the Lord helps us imagine meeting God.

If you desire to more effectively place yourself where you belong, visit the house of the Lord frequently enough to allow the Lord to put His law in your mind and to write it in your broken heart.³¹ For “all kingdoms have a law given,” and

you must know the law of the kingdom of your choosing or you cannot abide in it.³²

A willingness to keep sacred covenants with God that we make in the house of the Lord continues a process of inviting God's power into our lives.³³ Access to the power of God includes the spirit of revelation and the ability to "see" what is not seen. This enhances our ability to heed President Nelson's invitation to "think celestial."³⁴

It is thrilling to see the number of young adults who serve in the house of the Lord. We hope you will attend as often as you can.

Through repetition, eternal truths taught in the house of the Lord become embedded in our spiritual minds. It may be said that doctrine learned in the temple awakens our spiritual minds to things we learned before coming to this earth,³⁵ including mysteries not understood by the natural mind.

The more frequently we attend and the more earnestly we participate, the more revelatory the experience becomes.

2. Take Your Experience in the House of the Lord Home with You

In the house of the Lord, true doctrine and eternal principles are taught through sacred symbols. When we leave, we are privileged to carry a symbol of the temple with us. It is the garment of the holy priesthood, which we are given at the time of our endowment.

The garment is a symbolic reminder that it is only in and through Jesus Christ and because of His atoning sacrifice that we can ever regain the presence of the Father.

Don't miss the eternal significance of that statement. Only those who make covenants in the house of the Lord and faithfully keep them will be able to behold the loving face and brilliant countenance of God the Father throughout eternity.³⁶

President Russell M. Nelson has said:

*Your garment is symbolic of the veil [of the temple]; the veil is symbolic of the Lord Jesus Christ. So when you put on your garment, you may feel that you are truly putting upon yourself the very sacred symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ—His life, His ministry, and His mission, which was to atone for every daughter and son of God.*³⁷

Receive the garment with joy and wear it with reverence. Satan delights when a child of the covenant disregards the sacred symbolism of the garment. If you are looking for the times and activities when you can justify removing the garment rather than looking for ways to keep it on, you risk setting at naught the symbolic purpose and meaning of the garment.

The temple recommend should also be a constant reminder of an inner commitment to keep every covenant you have made. It is a symbol of belonging; if we are faithful to our covenants, it is a reminder that we "honorably hold a name and standing in [the house of the Lord], to all generations and for eternity."³⁸

A current temple recommend, worthily held, helps us feel connected to an eternal family and feel the joy of that belonging. For the "same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory."³⁹

Our temple recommend is a tangible symbol of personal worthiness and of our desire to be in the house of the Lord. Never let a day go by that it is not current. Never let a day go by that you are not worthy of it; but if you transgress, we pray that you will "speedily repent and return."⁴⁰ Think of the temple recommend as a certificate of entitlement to the power and blessings sought earnestly by Joseph Smith in his prayer at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple:

*And we ask thee, Holy Father, that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them.*⁴¹

Imagine this power flowing through your lives.

A third way to take our experience in the house of the Lord home with us is to regularly remind ourselves of the covenants we have made in the name of Jesus Christ. In October 2021, President Nelson extended the following invitation: "I invite you to set a regular time to rehearse in your mind the covenants you have made."⁴²

I invite you to make this a daily practice. After receiving this counsel from President Nelson, I began taking time in my morning prayers to consider the symbol of the garment I wear and to

rehearse in my mind the covenants I have made in the house of the Lord. I review each carefully. I evaluate my station and progress in the keeping of each covenant. I renew my commitment to keep each covenant by promising Heavenly Father I will give my very best. I ask for His grace to make up for my shortcomings.⁴³ This has brought about many sacred spiritual experiences.

I invite you to take time for the house of the Lord, to attend often, and to intentionally take your experience home with you through symbols and reminders.

3. Look for the City of the Living God

God invites us to fix our sights on the promises and rewards of righteousness. He knows that when we intentionally visualize the rewards that await the faithful in heavenly places and actively adopt habits that help us imagine that eternal reward as our own destination, the difficulties and temptations of this life lose their influence.

God knows that we cannot imagine a celestial home that we have not seen or about which we have not heard. In the scriptures we can study for ourselves the description of the glory that God has prepared for His faithful children because He has shown it to prophets, who have eyes to see.⁴⁴ Knowledge of the celestial city of God is motivating. It will enhance your capacity to imagine with an eye of faith.

Consider Abraham and Sarah.

“By faith Abraham . . . looked for a city . . . whose builder and maker is God.”⁴⁵ By faith Sarah “received strength to conceive seed” when she was long past the age of her fertility “because she judged him faithful who had promised.”⁴⁶ Sarah referred to the promises of God—given to Abraham and Sarah equally—that God had prepared a celestial city for their eternal habitation and that their posterity would be as numerous “as the stars of the sky [or] as the sand which is by the sea shore.”⁴⁷

Abraham and Sarah “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.”⁴⁸

When the promised rewards of the next life become so real in our minds that they motivate

our every action in this life, then we are drawing near to our eternal home.

If you can imagine the city of the living God, can you imagine the kind of people who inhabit it?

They dwell in the presence of God and Jesus Christ forever and ever. They are surrounded by a numberless company of angels. They belong to the “church of Enoch” and to the church “of the Firstborn.”⁴⁹ Their “names are written in heaven.”⁵⁰ They are citizens of that city, with all the rights and privileges that entails. They become heirs and rulers in the kingdom of God.⁵¹ They are just men and women who have been “made perfect through” the perfect Atonement of Jesus Christ by “the shedding of his own blood.”⁵²

Can you imagine being one of them? Oh, my heart cries, “Let this be me!”

I invite you to enter the house of the Lord. Make and keep the sacred covenants offered by the ordinances of the holy priesthood. Return often. Take the experience home with you in symbol and with intentional reminders. Fix your heart and mind on the eternal promises of God. Be persuaded of them. Embrace them. And imagine your place of belonging in the eternal home of the Father and the Son.

I witness the truth and very existence of God the Father and His glorious Son, Jesus Christ. They live! I testify of the actual reality of a coming day of joy and gladness for the faithful, who hear the voice of the Lord speaking to them: “Come unto me ye blessed.”

May you be blessed to imagine and experience that moment in your eternal lives, I so pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Matthew 13:16; Doctrine and Covenants 136:32.

2. Doctrine and Covenants 93:12; see also verses 11–13.

3. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022, [churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2022/05/12nelson). See 1 Corinthians 15:22; John 11:25; Mormon 3:20.

4. Alma 40:11. Please study Alma 40, in which Alma teaches his young adult son, Corianton, about these truths. We owe this doctrinally rich chapter to the relationship between a loving and discerning father and his questioning young adult son.

5. Doctrine and Covenants 138:57.

6. Alma 40:12.

7. See Mosiah 15:18–26; Alma 40:16–25. See Bruce R. McConkie, MD, s.v. “resurrection,” 640. See also John Taylor using the phrase “in the morning of the first resurrection” in John Taylor, “A Funeral Sermon” (31 December 1876), *Deseret News*, 21 March 1877, 99; also in Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor*, sel. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1943), 23. See also Wilford Woodruff, “Remarks” (19 and 20 May 1889), *Deseret Weekly*, 22 June 1889, 823; Woodruff, “Discourse” (3 August 1890), *Deseret Weekly*, 30 August 1890, 308.

8. 2 Nephi 9:15; Mormon 9:14.

9. Doctrine and Covenants 93:33, 34.

10. See 1 Nephi 22:21; 2 Nephi 1:10; 6:10; 9:15; 9:41.

11. 2 Nephi 9:41.

12. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity”; emphasis in original; quoting Alma 12:24; 34:32.

13. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Kingdoms of Glory,” *Liahona*, November 2023.

14. Doctrine and Covenants 59:23.

15. See Abraham 3:25–26.

16. 2 Nephi 9:39.

17. See “I Can Only Imagine,” words and music by Bart Millard (2001). See also the film *I Can Only Imagine* (2018) in which Bart Millard and his band MercyMe performed the song.

18. See 1 Nephi 19:23.

19. Alma 5:15.

20. Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2017.

21. Ether 12:32.

22. See McConkie, MD, s.v. “faith,” 264; see also 261.

23. Alma 5:16.

24. See, for example, D. Todd Christofferson, “The Doctrine of Belonging,” *Liahona*, November

2022; see also Gerrit W. Gong, “Covenant Belonging,” *Ensign*, November 2019.

25. 3 Nephi 17:10.

26. Study 1 Nephi 4:15–35.

27. Matthew 6:33. See Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38, for a more complete rendition of this scripture.

28. See “Deciding When to Receive the Endowment,” *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, August 2023 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ, 2023), 272.2.

29. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–40; 132:19.

30. John A. Widtsoe, CR, April 1922, 97; quoted in Howard W. Hunter, “We Have a Work to Do,” *Ensign*, March 1995. President Lorenzo Snow said:

The prospects that God has opened up to our view are wonderful and grand; the imagination cannot conceive of them. Come into the Temples and we will show you.

*. . . [The Lord] has prepared everything for the Latter-day Saints that they could possibly wish or imagine in order to effect their complete happiness throughout the vast eternities. [“Remarks” (13 March 1897), *Deseret Weekly*, 3 April 1897, 481]*

31. See Jeremiah 31:33.

32. Doctrine and Covenants 88:36; see also verses 37–39.

33. President Russell M. Nelson said, “Every man and every woman who participates in priesthood ordinances and who makes and keeps covenants with God has direct access to the power of God” (“The Everlasting Covenant,” *Liahona*, October 2022).

34. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!” *Liahona*, November 2023.

35. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:56.

36. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:21–22; 76:92–94.

37. Russell M. Nelson, “Enter into Thy Closet,” seminar for new mission leaders, Missionary Training Center, Provo, Utah, 26 June 2022.

38. Doctrine and Covenants 109:24.

39. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2.

40. Doctrine and Covenants 109:21.

41. Doctrine and Covenants 109:22.

42. Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” *Liahona*, November 2021.

43. See 2 Nephi 25:23; Ether 12:27.

44. Study Revelation 21; Doctrine and Covenants 76:50–70, 92–96.

45. Hebrews 11:8–10.

46. Hebrews 11:11.

47. Hebrews 11:12.

48. Hebrews 11:13.

49. Doctrine and Covenants 76:67.

50. Doctrine and Covenants 76:68.

51. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:55; Abraham 3:23.

52. Doctrine and Covenants 76:69; see also verses 62, 66–69.