

Rise to Your Divine Identity, Purpose, and Destiny

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Thank you, President and Sister Reese, for this privilege to be with you, the faculty, and your remarkable students on this very special morning. It is an honor to be back here in the Marriott Center on this court where memories flood my mind—both the thrills of victory and the agonies of defeat.

Now, speaking of defeat, I have got to show you something. This is my BYU basketball uniform. [The two pieces of a uniform were lifted up and displayed.] You think you are laughing right now, but just wait for a minute. One of my professional colleagues told me that I needed to be vulnerable a little bit here today and show empathy. I will be vulnerable; you show me empathy after you see this. These are the shorts we wore. [A pair of very short 1980s basketball shorts were shown.]

People used to say to us, “Boy, you were probably pretty good back in the day.”

And I would say, “Well, there were only maybe six or seven of us willing to actually put these

things on!” I mean, that is how you made the basketball team back then. These things wouldn’t have even passed the Honor Code of BYU!

This is my jersey. [The top from a uniform was lifted up and shown.] I was very proud to wear the name Brigham Young across my chest and to represent the Lord Jesus Christ and His university.

And now, speaking of the thrill of victory, one night after one of our basketball games, I walked back into our locker room and found these shoes sitting in my locker. [A pair of green athletic shoes was lifted up and shown.] These are Boston Celtics Danny Ainge shoes. Danny Ainge, one of my heroes, had come in that night and had left these shoes for me. I didn’t even get to see him!

Well, that was another one of those thrills that happened right here, and we will talk a bit more about life’s lessons learned here in a little while.

My thoughts this morning are best summarized by a line from “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles”:

Brian K. Taylor, a General Authority Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on March 19, 2024.

[Jesus Christ] *taught the truths of eternity, the reality of our premortal existence, the purpose of our life on earth, and the potential for the sons and daughters of God in the life to come.*¹

Likening God’s plan of happiness to a three-act play, Elder Quentin L. Cook recently taught:

*Those without knowledge of the Father’s plan do not understand what happened in the first act (or the premortal existence) and the purposes established there; nor do they understand the clarification and resolution that come in the third act, which is the glorious fulfillment of the Father’s plan.*²

This then begs the question “What are the natural consequences of not comprehending act 1 or act 3 in our Father’s plan as we now live in act 2?”

I wish I had an hour to talk to you about the reality of the social issues we face today, because most of the world has only a one-act view and we have a view of all three acts. A view of all three acts—the entire plan of salvation—helps us with the answers to almost all the social issues of the day.

Well, can you imagine waking up only to find yourself on a stage in the middle of the second act of a complex and fast-moving play with no idea who the characters are, what the plot is, and what role you play? With that pressure bearing down, one would feel much like the philosopher Blaise Pascal, who lamented:

*When I survey the whole universe . . . and man left to himself with no light, as though lost in this corner of the universe, without knowing who put him there, what he has come to do, what will become of him when he dies, incapable of knowing anything, **I am moved to terror**, like a man transported in his sleep to some terrifying desert island, who wakes up quite lost and with no means of escape.*³

Failing to comprehend our Father’s plan cultivates a society prone to anxiety and fear.

It is not shocking then that a recent Harvard study concluded that a majority of adolescents and young adults believe the most common challenge

contributing to their anxiety and depression is a lack of “‘**meaning or purpose**’ in their lives.”⁴ Another study indicated:

*As **identity** has become more and more of a self-directed task, without much external help . . . , mental health issues—such as depression, anxiety, and risk-taking behavior—have become increasingly prominent on college campuses in recent years.*⁵

Yet hope appears when we realize that God has given us answers for the source of Pascal’s terror and the significant challenges described in these studies. God has given us eternal truth—of our divine identity, purpose, and destiny. His “fabulous plan”⁶ provides deep meaning to our lives—literally a “why” in every direction, past, present, and future.

There is hope in the premortal life, there is hope in our mortal life, and there is hope in the postmortal life as well.

Life in fifteenth-century France was perhaps one of the darkest eras in the history of humankind. Living conditions were dreadful. Disease and death were commonplace. Food and resources were limited. And political instability catalyzed widespread conflict and devastation.

It was in these conditions in the village of Domrémy that a baby girl was born, a peasant named Joan. As she grew—and through a series of personal spiritual experiences—this girl felt “called” to reclaim her country from foreign rule.

Inspired by a divine vision of purpose, she convinced national royalty to make her captain in the French army. In a miraculous way, Joan, only a teenager then, led a military campaign to dispel the enemy forces and changed the destiny of France. We know this peasant girl today as Joan of Arc.

And what does Joan teach us about the antidote for despair, feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and fear? She embodies the words of our prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. When asked how to help young people who face daunting personal challenges, he said, “Teach them their identity and their purpose.”⁷ Joan of Arc illustrates the power in President Nelson’s further invitation to avoid

a “myopic”⁸ or nearsighted view of mortality and to instead “think celestial” and “take . . . an eternal view.”⁹

Act 1: The Premortal Existence—Divine Identity
Doctrinal Truth Number 1: Our Father’s Identity

So now we go to act 1, the premortal life. The Prophet Joseph Smith said:

I wish to go back to the beginning—to the morn of creation. . . .

. . . I want to go back to the beginning, and so lift your minds into more lofty spheres and a more exalted understanding than what the human mind generally aspires to. . . .

My first object is to find out the character of the only wise and true God, and what kind of a being He is. . . .

. . . It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God.¹⁰

In these statements, the Prophet Joseph corrected “man’s cosmetic remed[y]”¹¹ of self first. He taught, “If men do not comprehend the character of God [first], they do not comprehend themselves.”¹²

An understanding of God’s identity and our divine identities is the vital foundation for happiness and success as well as for avoiding the identity and purpose crisis we see around us today.

Listen to this description of God’s perfect character: “The Lord God [is] merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.”¹³ The Father and the Son are omniscient yet kind, omnipotent, and gentle.

As astonishing as this is, it is equally stunning to think that the divine, spiritual DNA of Almighty God flows in each of us! Though still in their infancy, these seeds of godhood planted within us hold every attribute of godliness, which makes it possible for us to become like Him. God’s work and glory is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”¹⁴ Our divine destiny begins with our royal, heavenly heritage, which began in premortality.

Never forget that you were “reared to [spiritual] maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father”¹⁵

and that it is His greatest desire for you to fulfill your divine destiny and return home to Him.

President Lorenzo Snow taught:

We were born in the image of God our Father; he begot us like unto himself. [He has given us a portion of Himself.] There is the nature of deity in the composition of our spiritual organization; in our spiritual birth our Father transmitted to us the capabilities, powers and faculties which he himself possessed . . . , although in an undeveloped state.¹⁶

I testify that the living God is your Eternal Father. Knowing His divine identity affirms your eternal birthright, making your life stable, secure, and settled.

This leads to your significant role in a second doctrinal truth.

Doctrinal Truth Number 2: The War in Heaven

We all love great stories and movies! Years ago, my wife, Jill, loved to load our kids up in the Suburban and hit the midnight debuts of movies like *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*. And she is still the first to rise and shout whenever these famous words scroll up the screen: “In a galaxy far, far away.”¹⁷

In these epic battles of good versus evil, as the odds stack up we eagerly wait for a hero to realize their identity and purpose. We know that when they remember, or begin to realize, who they really are and the great cause they are fighting for, the dark side doesn’t stand a chance! So just when hope seems lost—and courage begins to give way—up rises the good, the battle takes a turn, and our spirits soar as we cheer them on to victory.

Even more compelling are real-life heroes. Many of you are currently engaged in the fight of your life yet are heroically soldiering on. We are cheering for you, and it is for that very reason I want to remind you of a significant chapter from your premortal saga. Your story is better than any fictitious war that we read about or see on the big screen. I pray that these powerful scenes will help you remember who you are and see your true identity!

At the great Council in Heaven in our premortal state—or act 1—wherein the Father’s plan was presented, one-third of God’s spirit children, led by Lucifer, refused to accept Jesus Christ as the Savior and rebelled.¹⁸

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels [you and I] fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

And prevailed not. . . .

And the great dragon . . . , that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he [and his angels were] cast out into the earth. . . .

And [you] overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of [your] testimony; and [you] loved not [your] lives unto the death.

Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.¹⁹

You rose up in defense of God’s plan. You chose Jesus Christ as your Savior. And you fought courageously to help overcome Satan. Your very presence here today, in act 2, confirms your engagement in that fight against evil. It is irrefutable. It is indisputable. That chapter can never be taken away or unwritten from your lives.

Believing this will profoundly change you! It will change the way you view God, Jesus Christ, and your own value and worth—even hour by hour and day by day.

Is it any wonder then that President Nelson would say of you:

You are the children whom God chose to be part of His battalion during this great climax in the long-standing battle between good and evil—between truth and error.²⁰

President Nelson also said:

As the Lord’s prophet, I bless you to know the truth about who you are and to treasure the truth about what your glorious potential really is. I bless you to take charge of your own testimony. And I bless you to have the desire and strength to keep your covenants.

As you do, I promise that you will experience spiritual growth, freedom from fear, and a confidence that you can scarcely imagine now. You will have the strength to have a positive influence far beyond your natural capacity. And I promise that your future will be more exhilarating than anything you can presently believe.²¹

Before focusing on act 2, I would like to look ahead to act 3, our divine destiny.

Act 3: Divine Destiny

President Lorenzo Snow taught:

My hopes in reference to the future life are supremely grand and glorious, and I try to keep these prospects bright continually; and that is the privilege and the duty of every Latter-day Saint.²²

King Benjamin taught that as we

hold out faithful to the end [we] are received into heaven, that thereby [we] may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.²³

What more could be hoped for in eternity than to become pure “as he is pure,”²⁴ to become “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,”²⁵ and to “have glory added upon [our] heads for ever and ever.”²⁶

President Nelson said of you:

I would not be surprised to learn that premortally you loved the Lord so much that you promised to defend His name and gospel during this world’s tumultuous winding-up scenes.²⁷

Now let us go back to act 2.

Act 2: Divine Purpose

Catching this glimpse of our divine identity as God’s offspring and of our potential destiny to become like Him, we better understand our purposes in this probationary mortal estate.

We are here in act 2 because

Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

*And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall.*²⁸

Being clothed with physical bodies in this second act, we come to experience the joy of our redemption as our loyalties to God are “prove[d] . . . herewith.”²⁹ Through mortality’s challenges, we strive to overcome the allure of self-interested living by “putt[ing] off the natural man [or woman] and becom[ing] a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord.”³⁰ I witness that our Savior, Jesus Christ, makes this miraculous change possible.

Furthermore, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we engage in the gathering of Israel in preparation for the Lord’s Second Coming, which President Nelson called “*the greatest cause*” and “the mission for which you were sent to earth.”³¹

Thus we align our hearts with the Lord’s through obedience to His gospel. And it is through faith unto repentance, service, and covenant living that we fulfill the measure of our creation.

Jesus taught:

- “I came into the world to do the will of my Father.”³²
- “He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”³³
- “He . . . shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come”³⁴—or, in other words, “a fulness of joy.”³⁵

Notice that our mission—or purpose here—is not the profession we are working toward, although with excellence we pursue education and vocations to provide for our families and to bless and serve our fellow beings. “Becoming BYU,” as President and Sister Reese have invited,³⁶ integrates this magnificent combination of spiritual and temporal gifts and competencies, which naturally elevate humanity in the Savior’s holy causes. It is discipleship of the Lord, Jesus Christ, that fills our lives with meaning and purpose.

This poem illustrates how the adversary attempts to deceive and distract us from our divine purposes:

The Golden Ladder

*You can have it all! Just climb this gold ladder.
Success on top, with all the pomp and chatter.
It’s more than worth it, the small price won’t matter.
Happiness served up on a silver platter!*

*Many choose to ascend. Few wisely scatter.
Thus, shaping destinies; happy or sadder.
It’s all a mirage; rungs collapse; dreams shatter.
Beware the allure of the golden ladder!*

The devil is always enticing us to compare, compete, and contend. But remember, comparison is the thief of joy. Contention is the thief of peace. And competition is the thief of love. These are the spiritual gifts and fruits that the devil is after.

An eternal perspective enables us to see through the devil’s lies and to move forward confidently with great faith in the Father’s great plan of happiness.

Because this Marriott Center provided me with some very special purpose-refining experiences, I would like to share a few of them with you in hopes that they will provide inspiration as you navigate your own bright second-act futures.

Three Marriott Center Purpose-Refining Experiences

Sister Patricia T. Holland’s Witness and Invitation

First, just twelve days before I met Jill, she and I were sitting in the chairs you are now in. We were not together. We heard President Jeffrey R. Holland and Sister Patricia T. Holland at an inspiring devotional. How we love them and miss her. That devotional address blessed Jill because of one specific phrase and blessed me because of another.

Sister Holland said:

At a very difficult and challenging time in my life, Jeff gave me a new copy of the scriptures and I began to read the Book of Mormon as I had never read it before. In a very real way that I cannot share today, but which is very personal and very true, it saved my life. I treasured every word, I savored every chapter. I came

to know the promise of section 84 in the Doctrine and Covenants—that my mind was **not** darkened and I was **not** under condemnation because I had **not** forgotten the Book of Mormon (see verses 54–57).

We ask you, every day you are here, to read at least one verse in the Book of Mormon—more if you can—but **something** from the Book of Mormon to give light to your life: “Light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (D&C 84:45). I promise you miracles if you will do it.³⁷

Upon hearing those very words back in 1986, I made a firm commitment to study the Book of Mormon every day. And moved profoundly by the phrase “it saved my life” in Sister Holland’s talk, my dear Jill found herself being “saved” by the Book of Mormon’s power a few years later.

President Ezra Taft Benson’s Lesson of a Lifetime

Before a big game one night, our BYU basketball team was invited to meet President Ezra Taft Benson, the Lord’s prophet. The memory of this experience remains crystal clear in my mind even today. After the thrill of shaking the prophet’s hand, we heard President Benson share a sixty-second lesson. This became a lesson of a lifetime for me.

He said, “Your basketball team has the Spirit. And the Spirit will be your greatest asset on the court. It will do more for you than all your talents combined.”

President Benson then told us, “The Spirit will be your greatest asset in life, and if you have it, you will accomplish your righteous goals.”

Then, with love, he added this warning: “And if you don’t, you won’t.”

He then urged, “You can fool a lot of people—your parents and your professors—but you cannot fool yourselves. You know if you have the Spirit or not.”

So let’s keep repenting along the way, brothers and sisters. I have never forgotten this special moment with the prophet. And we did win that game!

Speaking of a glorious welcome home that we will receive for our faithfulness here, President Nelson once said to me, “If you have chosen the

covenant path, you get all that! And if you choose otherwise, you miss all that!”

How significant and relevant are our dear prophet’s words: “In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”³⁸

The Savior’s Words: “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God”

One last Marriott Center experience began with Jill and me, poor as church mice, collecting toilet paper rolls underneath the seats after a game we played here—you know, the games when after the first basket is made everyone throws a roll of toilet paper streaming down onto the court? (Don’t do that here, okay?)

We were living on the tightest of budgets. Saving a little money by gathering the toilet paper seemed like a great idea. With this third Marriott Center image as a backdrop, I want to tell you the rest of the story that highlights forever in my heart the Savior’s words “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”³⁹

Right before graduation, I had a great job interview. Arriving home, I excitedly told Jill that I thought I would get the job.

A week went by, and I had not heard a word. Jill asked if I still felt good about it, and I responded that I did.

Then another week passed with no word. Jill asked again how I felt.

With less optimism, I said, “I will call and see.”

Unfortunately, the company had gone with someone else.

I then saw a look in her eye that I had never seen before. She seemed nervous and tentative. I asked her if something was wrong.

She said timidly, “When you came home a couple of weeks ago and said you thought we would get the job, I wrote a tithing check on the amount of money we would be receiving in the new job to thank Heavenly Father beforehand. I am so sorry.”

Two things passed through my mind in that moment. First, I realized that she had paid about

half our monthly income—but, you know, we all love eating ramen the second half of the month! Then a second thought came as I looked into the eyes of this purest of souls. This thought was, “God will always watch over and take care of you and your family because of Jill’s pure and unshakable faith.”

I knew in that moment that we—the couple who had scavenged under the Marriott Center seats for toilet paper rolls—would always be all right. I knew that God would bless her “even an hundred fold, yea, more,”⁴⁰ for having offered her loaves and fishes⁴¹ unto Him first. It brings tears to my eyes just thinking about this sacred moment and about this most faithful daughter of God.

God’s plan of salvation is perfect and literally has a “why”—or, just for today, a “Y”—in every direction—past, present, and future. Gratefully, you can know with certainty who you are, why you are here, and where you are going.



Now is your time. You have great causes to undertake and seemingly insurmountable challenges to overcome! Unlimited possibilities or limitless perils sit on the horizon awaiting your choices. In his timeless poem, Robert Frost wrote:

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*⁴²

With every hope and in all the energy of my heart, I invite you to keep always before your eyes and rise to God’s eternal vision of your divine identity, purpose, and destiny! As you do, I promise He will bless you beyond your fondest hopes and expectations, even amidst life’s struggles and challenges. I joyfully witness that Jesus

Christ lives and loves you with all His heart. He suffered, bled, and died to pay the infinite price to make eternal life possible for every one of us. I know these things are true and witness this to you in all sincerity in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles” (1 January 2000).
2. Quentin L. Cook, “Be Peaceable Followers of Christ,” *Liahona*, November 2023.
3. Blaise Pascal, section 1, chapter 15, “Transition from Knowledge of Man to Knowledge of God,” no. 198, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 59; emphasis added.
4. Richard Weissbourd, Milena Batanova, Joseph McIntyre, and Eric Torres, with Shanae Irving, Sawsan Eskander, and Kiran Bhai, *On Edge: Understanding and Preventing Young Adults’ Mental Health Challenges* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Making Caring Common Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2023), 2; emphasis added. See also “Mental Health Challenges of Young Adults Illuminated in New Report,” News, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 24 October 2023.
5. Seth J. Schwartz, Sam A. Hardy, Byron L. Zamboanga, Alan Meca, Alan S. Waterman, Simona Picariello, Koen Luyckx, Elisabetta Crocetti, Su Yeong Kim, Aerika S. Brittan, Sharon E. Roberts, Susan Krauss Whitbourne, Rachel A. Ritchie, Elissa J. Brown, and Larry F. Forthun, “Identity in Young Adulthood: Links with Mental Health and Risky Behavior,” *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 36 (January–February 2015): 39–40; emphasis added. See also Hadiye Kaynak-Demir, “Sense of Identity and Psychopathology in Youngsters” (unpublished dissertation thesis, Adnan Menderes University, Institute of Health Science, Aydın, Türkiye, 2003).
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!” *Liahona*, November 2023.
7. Russell M. Nelson; quoted in Tad R. Callister, “Our Identity and Our Destiny,” BYU Campus Education Week devotional address, 14 August 2012.

8. Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign*, November 2020.
9. Nelson, “Think Celestial!”
10. Joseph Smith, discourse at a conference of the Church, Nauvoo, Illinois, 7 April 1844; *HC* 6:303–5; emphasis added; also “Classics in Mormon Thought: The King Follett Sermon,” *Ensign*, April 1971 (concludes in *Ensign*, May 1971).
11. Neal A. Maxwell, “Overcome . . . Even as I Also Overcame,” *Ensign*, May 1987.
12. Joseph Smith, *HC* 6:303; also “The King Follett Sermon.”
13. Exodus 34:6.
14. Moses 1:39.
15. Statement of the First Presidency (Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund), “Editor’s Table: The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era*, November 1909, 80; also in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833–1964*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 4:205; reprinted in *Ensign*, February 2002.
16. Lorenzo Snow, “Discourse” (14 January 1872), *Deseret News*, 24 January 1872, 597; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ, 2012), 84.
17. The opening crawl of the beginning sequences of every numbered film of the *Star Wars* series.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 29:36.
19. Revelation 12:7–9, 11–12.
20. Russell M. Nelson, “The Love and Laws of God,” BYU devotional address, 17 September 2019.
21. Russell M. Nelson, “Choices for Eternity,” worldwide devotional for young adults, 15 May 2022.
22. Lorenzo Snow, *CR*, October 1900, 4; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow*, 89.
23. Mosiah 2:41.
24. Moroni 7:48.
25. Romans 8:17.
26. Abraham 3:26.
27. Nelson, “The Love and Laws of God.”
28. 2 Nephi 2:25–26.
29. Abraham 3:25.
30. Mosiah 3:19; see also Abraham 3:25.
31. Russell M. Nelson, in Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” worldwide youth devotional, 3 June 2018; emphasis in original.
32. 3 Nephi 27:13.
33. Matthew 10:39; see also 16:25.
34. Doctrine and Covenants 59:23.
35. Doctrine and Covenants 93:33, 34; Moses 7:67; see also Psalm 16:11; 3 Nephi 28:10.
36. See C. Shane Reese, “Becoming BYU: An Inaugural Response,” address delivered at his inauguration as BYU president, 19 September 2023; see also Wendy W. Reese, “Being ‘Doers of the Word,’” BYU devotional address, 9 January 2024.
37. Patricia T. Holland, in Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland, “Unless You’re a Mormon,” BYU devotional address, 9 September 1986; emphasis in original.
38. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018.
39. Matthew 6:33.
40. Doctrine and Covenants 78:19.
41. See Matthew 14:15–21; 15:32–38; Mark 6:35–44.
42. Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken” (1916), stanza 4.