

## *Preparing for Your Spiritual Destiny*

Neil L. Andersen

My dear young brothers and sisters, I cannot see all of your faces here in the Marriott Center and, of course, I cannot see your faces in the thousands of chapels across the world, but I can feel of your goodness, your desire to do right, and your love of the Lord and His restored gospel. One of the blessings of being a General Authority is that we have the opportunity of being with you across the world. In the past few months, we have seen your faces and shaken your hands in many locations in the United States. We traveled with President and Sister Uchtdorf last June to Eastern Europe, Russia, and the United Kingdom. In October we were in South Africa and West Africa. In November we returned from Central America. There is a great power of righteousness among the young adults and youth of this Church. Take comfort in knowing that you are joined by thousands and hundreds of thousands in the challenges you face and in the important purposes you feel. I love you and pray that the Spirit of the Lord will be with us as we discuss things that are important to you tonight.

I have lived in this mortal life three to four decades longer than most of you, but it is not my experience that brings me before you. Realizing my own weaknesses, I stand before

you as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, ordained and commissioned to testify of Him and to speak the things He would speak. My assignment tonight comes from the Savior's chief Apostle, President Thomas S. Monson.

As I look at you, I think of myself 37 years ago. I had just returned from a mission to France. With few resources other than a little borrowed money, I had come to Brigham Young University. I had found work as a window washer on the campus. It would be another year before I would meet the light of my life, Kathy Williams. I felt somewhat alone and unsure about the road ahead. I remember thinking, "What is in my future, and how should I prepare for it?"

Remembering these thoughts, I have entitled my message tonight "Preparing for Your Spiritual Destiny."

When Jesus was upon the earth, He would often speak of tangible objects to help His disciples better understand the intangible, the spiritual. He spoke of seeds and grain and barns and hens and flowers and foxes and

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dozens of other physical objects to help people understand more about faith and repentance, spiritual power and salvation.

He did not speak of airplanes, as they were not a part of His society, but President Uchtdorf has made up for that in the last few years and has given us wonderful teachings from his own experiences as a pilot.

I have an airplane story tonight that will teach us about preparing for our spiritual destiny.

### **Captain Sullenberger and US Airways Flight 1549**

Exactly one year ago this week—January 15, 2009—US Airways Flight 1549 took off from LaGuardia Airport in New York City and lifted quickly into the sky on what was expected to be an uneventful trip to Charlotte, North Carolina, along the eastern coast of the United States. The airplane captain was Captain Chesley B. “Sully” Sullenberger. He had more than 19,000 hours of flying behind him, and he expected the next hour and a half would be very routine.

As the Airbus A320 climbed to 3,000 feet, the unexpected was suddenly right in front of him. A flock of mammoth Canadian geese with six-foot wingspans was directly in the path of the airplane. The large birds hit the plane. Worse still, the giant engines on the two wings, drawing air into their turbines with enormous force, drew in as well the geese in the path of the plane. There was a terrible grinding sound as the birds were sucked into the engines. Then, a deafening silence—the engines had stopped.

Captain Sullenberger immediately began determining how he could safely land the plane. He first considered returning to the airport, and then to a different airport not far away. The dangers and risks were enormous. He did not know how long he could glide the plane without engine power. He had only a moment to decide. Captain Sullenberger determined his best chance was to land the plane

in the Hudson River, a river that runs close to New York City. In those few seconds all his training as an airline captain, all his judgment, his instincts, and his talents were brought to bear on the emergency landing ahead of him.

With skyscrapers outside the windows, the plane dropped quickly, flying only 900 feet above the George Washington Bridge. Then, with the plane flying as slowly as possible and with the wings perfectly straight across the water, he pulled the nose up and glided the belly of the plane onto the water. The plane, weighing 120 tons, skipped across the water and then safely stopped fully intact.

Winter weather was well below freezing, and the captain knew the plane would begin sinking. The passengers were quickly assisted out the emergency exits onto the wings. The plane’s life rafts were inflated, and boats from the shore moved quickly to rescue the passengers. The news was almost unbelievable. While a \$60-million plane had been lost, Captain Sullenberger had landed safely, and all of the 154 passengers and crew were safe, as well as Captain Sullenberger.

As Jesus did in His teachings, let’s relate the tangible with the intangible, the material to the spiritual. Let’s discuss three areas where our spiritual destiny—your spiritual destiny—can be seen in the flight of US Airways 1549. First, you are on a journey through mortality. Second, you are to be a captain in the Lord’s cause with a specific mission to accomplish. Third, your sacred duty is to return safely and bring many with you.

### **Journey Through Mortality**

*Number 1: You are on a journey through mortality.*

The passengers of Flight 1549 did not begin their existence as they entered the plane in New York. They were on a journey. Much had occurred in their lives prior to the flight, and much would occur following the flight. Likewise, this mortal life is not where we began nor is it where we will end. We are on

a journey. This journey began a very long time ago in a premortal state where we received our “first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the Lord” (D&C 138:56). We are literally spirit sons and daughters of heavenly parents. The Lord has said, “I am God; I made the world, and men before they were in the flesh” (Moses 6:51), “for in heaven created I them” (Moses 3:5).

The poet William Wordsworth wrote these beautiful words:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home.*<sup>1</sup>

Our premortal life was not a passive existence. We had choices to make there as we do here. We had progressed and were in need of a physical body and the experiences of mortality. We needed to prove our willingness to live by faith. Our Heavenly Father presented a plan to us. Central to that plan was the role of His Only Begotten Son to provide a way back for us. We accepted the Father's plan and rejoiced in the chosen Savior. Our foreordained opportunities and responsibilities help shape what we are to do in mortality. In ways not fully understood, “our actions in the spirit world influence us in mortality.”<sup>2</sup>

We are now here—in our long-awaited mortality. Although we have no present memory of our premortal life, it rings true to us. Even in this life we don't remember all the things that are important. For example, do you remember speaking your first words or taking your first steps? Do you remember thinking, “You know, my mother is not carrying me around as much as she used to. So,

if I am going to move around like I want to, I better get up and walk”? It is not difficult for us to sense deep inside that who we are did not begin with our birth into mortality. We are sons and daughters of God. There is a passage in Alma that describes the role of the scriptures to “[enlarge] the memory of this people” (Alma 37:8). Our memories have been enlarged, and we know that we prepared for the life we are now living.

Just as our life began before our birth into mortality, our life does not end with the stopping of a heartbeat. We will continue on. Who you are—you, the distinct individual—you will always be you. Some may say, “I don't like myself.” Sorry. You can shape who you become, you can be more than you are today, but you will always be you.

### **A Captain in the Lord's Cause**

*Number 2: You are to be a spiritual captain in the Lord's cause, with a specific mission to accomplish.*

You and I have a spiritual destiny, and it does not allow us to ride passively in the back of the plane traveling through mortality. The Lord promised Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (see Genesis 22:18; Abraham 2:9). He was speaking of the spiritual blessing brought to the world through us, whom He referred to as “children of the covenant” (3 Nephi 20:26). Alma described some as “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God” (Alma 13:3).

Have you ever wondered: Why is it that I am who I am? Why is it I feel the way I feel? Why have I chosen to believe so fully in the Lord Jesus Christ? Why do I choose to keep His commandments when others do not care about them? Why do I feel the way I do about the Book of Mormon? Why do the words come off the page of scripture and go directly into my heart when others are almost indifferent about this sacred book? Why have I been willing to make sacred covenants through baptism,

make covenants in the temple, and—for many of you—serve a mission?

You were chosen and foreordained to have the gospel in your life and to be a leader in the cause of the restored gospel.

Captain Sullenberger had more than 19,000 hours of flying at the time of Flight 1549. In reflecting about his decision to become a pilot, he said that at age 16, after less than eight hours of flying in a small single-engine plane, he knew that flying would be a part of his destiny.<sup>3</sup>

Accept that you have an eternally important destiny, a spiritual destiny. Read your patriarchal blessing. As was said of Queen Esther of old, “Thou art come . . . for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). Believe it, and embrace it!

Realizing who you are and who you are supposed to be doesn’t make you a captain in the Lord’s cause. There are obstacles and temptations much more treacherous than a flock of giant Canadian geese that would keep you from your destiny. You must be on guard. To be a captain in the Lord’s cause, there needs to be preparation. And that preparation isn’t easy! The Savior said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). He further explained that “for a man to take up his cross, [means he] is to deny himself [of] all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and [to] keep [the Lord’s] commandments” (Matthew 16:24, footnote d; from JST, Matthew 16:26).

In reflecting on his time in training at the Air Force Academy, Captain Sullenberger said:

*It was an intense experience. . . . We were being tested, . . . challenged. And we had to watch a number of those in our ranks fall away. . . .*

*. . . It made me realize that if I dug deep enough, I could find strength I didn’t know I had. If I hadn’t been forced to push myself . . . , I would never have known the full extent of what inner resources I had to draw upon.<sup>4</sup>*

Spiritual preparation will uncover your own inner resources. There is power in prayer. There is strength in the scriptures. We learn to step forward in faith and to be more fully obedient. Worthily preparing for and taking the sacrament each week renews and protects us. We receive the priceless gift of the Holy Ghost. This heavenly gift is real and absolutely essential to keeping us safe.

In talking about being an airline captain, Captain Sullenberger warned:

*Not every situation can be foreseen or anticipated. There isn’t a checklist for everything.<sup>5</sup>*

Also:

*You have to know what you know and what you don’t know. . . .*

*You also need to understand how judgment can be affected by circumstances.<sup>6</sup>*

These same principles apply to our spiritual mission. Personal revelation received through the gift of the Holy Ghost guides us through the unforeseen in accomplishing what we are here to do. And personal righteousness is essential to having the gift of the Holy Ghost. We will not be guided by the Holy Ghost if we are casual about our obedience.

Central to all that we think and do is the Lord Jesus Christ. His life is our model. It is because of Him that we will live again. It is by the power of His Atonement that we can stand clean in the presence of our Father. We learn to love our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, with all our heart, might, mind, and strength. I like the statement “He loves the Lord with all his heart who loves nothing in comparison of him, and nothing but in reference to him.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

There are many good people upon the earth. There are many unselfish people. There are others who believe in Christ as we do. We are

not alone in praying to our Heavenly Father or in receiving answers to our prayers; our Father loves all of His children. But we must never forget that only in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the priesthood of God. Only here is the Lord's prophet. Only here is the sacred sealing power that allows families to continue as families forever.

Although this broadcast is being transmitted in 33 languages, we are few in number compared to the billions upon the earth. Peter called us "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, . . . a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9). Do not dismiss nor diminish the specific role and responsibility that has been given you. You are to be a captain in the Lord's cause, charged with holding the banner of the restored gospel high, for the Lord has said that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be "a messenger before [His] face to prepare the way before [Him]" (D&C 45:9).

### Your Sacred Duty

*Number 3: Your sacred duty is to return safely and bring many with you.*

Much of your spiritual destiny will be etched in the lives of those you help spiritually. What made Captain Sullenberger a hero? What made him respected and appreciated? Was it that he could think quickly? That he made the right choices when the engines stopped? Was it that he knew how to keep the wings perfectly level as he landed in the water? Well, it was all of that! But most important, 154 lives could have easily been lost, and he saved them. And in saving them, he also saved himself.

Captain Sullenberger said of saving the physical lives of his passengers:

*In the abstract, 155 is just a number. But looking into the faces of all of those passengers—and then the faces of all their loved ones—it brought home to me how profoundly wonderful it was that we had such a good outcome on Flight 1549.<sup>8</sup>*

Can we apply this to our mission? Members of this Church are enormously generous in helping the poor and needy both in the Church and across the world. However, our divine mission, the blessing the Lord said would come through the posterity of Abraham to the world, is primarily spiritual.

We are to turn our lives outward, helping others to return to our Heavenly Father with us.

The Lord has said, "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39). Let me read from Matthew 25, thinking about our role as spiritual captains, inserting the word *spiritually*:

*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*

*For I was an hungred [spiritually], and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty [spiritually], and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger [spiritually], and ye took me in. . . .*

*Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred [spiritually], and fed thee? or thirsty [spiritually], and gave thee drink? . . .*

*And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. [Matthew 25:34–35, 37, 40]*

Who are you to bring with you? First of all, for all who have the opportunity, you are to marry and bring your spouse and your family. This is your first responsibility. Families are the organization of heaven.

To appreciate this responsibility we look far beyond what we see right in front of us. The spiritual effect of raising a righteous family is only understood as we look through our generations to our grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and beyond. Captain Sullenberger

understood this principle even in saving the physical lives of his passengers. He said:

*I don't know the good things still to be accomplished by the 154 people on my flight. I can't fathom what contributions might be made to the world by their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren yet to be born.*<sup>9</sup>

Let me share with you the effects of spiritually preparing a family through many generations.

Henry Arline lived from 1841 to 1919. In 1898, at 57 years old, he heard the missionaries preach the gospel in a schoolhouse in the state of Florida in the United States. He told his wife, "For the first time, I have heard the truth." He and his family were baptized. A few years later they traveled by train to Utah, a trip of more than 2,000 miles, so they could receive the sealing ordinances of the temple. He returned to Florida and remained true and faithful the remainder of his life.

His daughter was Sophronia Arline Williams, and her son was James Bernard Williams. Bernard Williams met a beautiful young lady, Martha Aman. She honestly investigated the Church, developed a firm testimony, and was baptized.

Eight years after their marriage, they were sealed in the Salt Lake Temple with their three children. Their little daughter was Kathy Williams, whom I met years later at BYU and begged her to be my wife. We now have four children and 13 grandchildren.

I will forever be thankful for Kathy's righteous mother and her righteous great-grandfather who joined the Church and remained true and faithful all the rest of their lives. These two people never knew each other in mortality. They lived at different times. Yet they are captains in the Lord's cause, helping to bring our family with them because of their spiritual choices.

It's true that not all will have the opportunity to marry in this life, but an eternal companion is promised in the eternities to the righteous who desire such a blessing. Those who do not marry can do much in piloting the Lord's cause and bringing souls with them. This past conference, Sister Barbara Thompson, who is in the Relief Society general presidency and is single, shared these words:

*When I left high school, my goals were to attend college . . . , get married to a handsome man, and have four perfect, beautiful children. . . .*

*Well, as you may know, many of my goals were not realized in the way I had hoped. I finished college, served a mission, got a job, continued on with my schooling . . . , and continued working in my profession for many years. . . . But there was no handsome man, no marriage, and no children. . . .*

*One work colleague who was not a member of our Church said to me, "Why do you continue to go to a church that puts so much emphasis on marriage and families?" My simple answer to her was, "Because it is true!" . . . With the Church and gospel of Jesus Christ in my life, I found happiness and I knew I was on the path the Savior would have me follow.*

She spoke of one way she could influence others spiritually while being single:

*I had the opportunity to serve many years in Young Women and felt that gave me an opportunity to teach and testify to younger women who were developing their testimonies.<sup>10</sup>*

Twenty-five years ago Sister Thompson was Shellie Nielson's Laurel adviser. Shellie Nielson—who is now Shellie Nielson Seager—wrote Sister Thompson more than 20 years after being in her Laurel class, expressing her appreciation. Sister Seager wrote:

*I woke up at 5:15 a.m. and started thinking about you and what an impact you have had on my life. . . .*

*. . . We were a priority to you. You always showed us so much attention, care, and love. You were always so much fun! . . . Most important, we knew you had a strong testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>*

Sister Seager now has a family with five children. Sister Thompson's influence for good will forever touch Sister Seager and the generations that follow.

The Lord said:

*Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. . . .*

*And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, [and crying repentance simply means helping people return to God] and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!*

*And now, if your joy will be great with one soul . . . , how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me! [D&C 18:10, 15–16]<sup>12</sup>*

As we turn our attention to others—first our spouse, then our family, and then to others—spiritually lifting them and helping them remain firm and steady, we are saving generations and fulfilling our eternal destiny.

Luciano Cascardi is president of the São Paulo Brazil Ipiranga Stake. Brother Cascardi was a six-year-old boy when his family was baptized in São Paulo, Brazil. President Cascardi came to the United States this past October looking for the missionary who had taught his family 40 years before. He knew one thing for sure: the first name of the missionary was Elder.

Through a number of miracles, Brother Cascardi found him—Brother Larry Wilson, a strong Church leader in northern California. In a letter to Brother Wilson, President Cascardi

compared finding his missionary with finding a lost father after many years. Then, referring to the spiritual seed that sprouted 40 years ago and has multiplied and touched so many lives since, President Cascardi said, “You can count the seeds in an apple, but you can't count the apples in a seed.”<sup>13</sup>

We don't have to be on a mission to strengthen and lift others. President Monson constantly teaches us to reach out and rescue those around us. Do you remember the story of him reaching out as a young bishop to someone who was not attending church?

President Monson said:

*When I was called as a bishop, I recognized I was the president of the priests quorum, and I wanted to get every boy out. There was one boy that never came, and I thought to myself: “I'm sitting here with the priests. They've got an adviser. I'll leave them to get the lesson from the adviser. I'm going to go find Richard Casto.” And I went over to his home. His mother and dad were home, and they said he was working over at the West Temple Garage.*

*I went over to Fifth South and West Temple, and the door was open but nobody [was] there. And so I started looking around, you know, and nobody. So I went around the back, and there was one of these old-fashioned grease pits.*

*And I looked down into the darkness, and I could see two eyes looking at me. He said, “You got me, Bishop. I'll come up.” And he came up out of the grease pit.*

*And we had a nice little visit there together. And I said, “Richard, we need you. You have a way with people. And I want to have every priest in attendance. Will you come?” He said, “I'll come.” And he came.*

Years later, Richard Casto shared what happened after that incident:

*After that I served a mission. I was sealed to my wife in the temple. We have five great children—two of them have served missions. I've served as a bishop*

*twice. My children have a great love for him, and my wife has a great love for him because of what he did for me. It's probably one of the greatest blessings that I had ever received in my life.*<sup>14</sup>

In the October 2009 general conference, President Monson said:

*I believe the Savior is telling us that unless we lose ourselves in service to others, there is little purpose to our own lives. Those who live only for themselves eventually shrivel up and figuratively lose their lives, while those who lose themselves in service to others grow and flourish—and in effect save their lives.*<sup>15</sup>

You are to be a captain in the Lord's cause, with a specific mission to return home safely and bring many with you.

### **Endure with a Brightness of Hope**

I close with a personal experience. It too is an airline story.

This past November 9, my wife, Kathy, and I were traveling back from Guatemala City with a connecting flight in Miami, Florida. We had an important appointment, and it was vital that we catch the plane in Miami. We started early that morning, leaving our hotel outside of Antigua, Guatemala, for an 8:55 a.m. departure to Miami. As we traveled into Guatemala City, the traffic was unusually congested. We were concerned about reaching the airport on time. We arrived with just enough time to catch our plane.

We rushed through immigration and toward the departure gate. At the gate, we learned that our plane would not be leaving for an hour and a half. It had arrived late the night before in turbulent weather. The pilots and crew were required to have a certain amount of time to rest. With this delay, we worried about making our connection in Miami. We boarded the plane an hour and a half later, but, after backing away from the gate, we learned that there

was an electronic malfunction in the cockpit. This delayed us another 40 minutes. We took a deep breath, wondering if there was any possibility of making our connection.

The plane made good time between Guatemala City and Miami. We arrived in Miami with only 30 minutes before our connecting plane was scheduled to leave. Thirty minutes did not seem long enough, but we were determined to try. We ran as fast as we could. Surprisingly, the line at Immigration was short. We headed for U.S. Customs, silently praying that the luggage we were pulling behind us would not be chosen for inspection. Our prayers were answered. Glancing at the airport monitors, I noted that our airplane was at Gate D-3. After running to the D concourse came the painful process of security screening: Off with the shoes. Liquids in a plastic bag. Laptop separate. Hope that the security monitor doesn't buzz when moving through the screener.

Completing the security check, we had only 10 minutes before the scheduled departure. I looked up at the monitor again. To my horror, I had made a mistake—the plane was not leaving from D-3 but from E-3. We were in the wrong concourse. We were out of breath. The plane doors were probably already closed, and we were several hundred yards away. We thought about giving up. But, receiving encouragement from each other, we pushed ourselves toward the finish. Off we sprinted, rolling bags right behind. As we rounded the turn to Gate E-3, we heard them call our names. It was a miracle. The door was still open. We made it!

Your spiritual destiny will have obstacles, delays, and equipment malfunctions. There will be mistakes. You may wonder if you are going to make it. Don't be discouraged! You will also have moments of hope and faith as doors open and obstacles are overcome. Continue, persist, above all, believe in Christ and learn to follow Him and His prophets;



endure, as Nephi said, with a “brightness of hope” (2 Nephi 31:20). As you do, I promise you, one day you will hear your name. You will make it.

Our Heavenly Father lives. We are His sons and His daughters. Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer. He restored His gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith. President Monson is His prophet today. I pray that all the blessings of heaven that await you may be yours as you prepare for your spiritual destiny. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. William Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” (1807), in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 351.
2. Dallin H. Oaks, in *CR*, October 1993, 97; or “The Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, November 1993, 72.
3. See Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger, with Jeffrey Zaslow, *Highest Duty: My Search for What Really Matters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 5, 10.
4. Sullenberger, *Highest Duty*, 93, 95.
5. Sullenberger, *Highest Duty*, 188.
6. Sullenberger, *Highest Duty*, 119–20.
7. Howard W. Hunter, in *CR*, April 1965, 58.
8. Sullenberger, *Highest Duty*, 286.
9. Sullenberger, *Highest Duty*, 264.
10. Barbara Thompson, “Mind the Gap,” *Ensign*, November 2009, 119.
11. Letter addressed to Barbara Thompson from Shellie Nielsen Seager, dated April 2, 2007.
12. See Neil L. Andersen, “Repent . . . That I May Heal You,” *Ensign*, November 2009, 40–43.
13. From a personal letter from Larry Wilson, dated November 14, 2009, and an e-mail message to the Wilson family from Luciano Cascardi, dated October 9, 2009, translated from Portuguese.
14. Transcribed from *On the Lord’s Errand: The Life of Thomas S. Monson*, DVD (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2008) ; see also Thomas S. Monson, “They Will Come,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 46.
15. Thomas S. Monson, “What Have I Done for Someone Today?” *Ensign*, November 2009, 85.