

Would You Sell?

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It is reported that the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “I have a greater sense of humility when addressing [young men and women] than in standing before kings and queens.” He felt this way, I suspect, because he knew perfectly who they were and what they could become. I share Joseph’s feelings, especially today, for I see before me representatives of a rising generation with almost limitless possibilities.

I therefore pray humbly that I might be aided by the Holy Spirit in delivering a prepared message somewhat related to the process of becoming. It would be nice if I could present original material, including fresh thoughts and novel ideas. Such a luxury is not mine to enjoy. Many have treated the subject which I have in mind, and many have showered you with similar counsel. Mark Twain said, “What a good thing Adam had—when he said a good thing, he knew nobody had said it before.” Perhaps, however, my approach and my personal experiences will compensate for the inevitable redundancy.

Beet Field Lesson

Soon after my eighteenth birthday I was invited by my bishop (who happened to be my father) to work on the ward welfare farm. The

assignment was to thin beets in the company of other priesthood holders. I was a master of this slavetike labor; I have a lame back to prove it. I could do an acre in one day if I started before sunup and ended long after sundown (providing I cared little about standing erect for several days).

I worked diligently up one row and down another, hoping to finish the task early. One of the older workers was my stake president, a banker by profession. It pleased me to see him digging in the soil and sweating under the hot sun. It was the first time I had seen this very proper and fastidious priesthood leader dressed in anything other than a dark suit, white shirt, and tie. I must admit that I enjoyed watching him get dirt on his hands. In fact, I was so carried away by this pleasure (heaven forgive me!) that I sped up the soiling by deliberately kicking up clouds of dust in his direction as I moved by.

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On one move past President Roland Tietjen, he called my name and invited me to engage in conversation. I stopped, laid down my hoe, and sat on the soft ground. He asked, “Carlos, how old are you?”

I replied, “Eighteen.”

“Do you know how old I am?” he continued.

“Oh, about seventy” was my quick and foolish answer. (I missed the mark by many years!) Laughing without, and I suppose crying within, he said, “My time on earth is running out—yours is just beginning. Carlos, would you sell to me the next ten years of your life?” I thought to myself, what’s wrong with this money changer? Can’t he forget money and buying and selling for just one morning?

He was able to discern my thoughts and to note my discomfort. He quickly added, “I know that it is impossible for you to transfer to me part of your life. However, if it were possible, would you sell?”

With little hesitation I blurted out, “No, I would not.”

“Suppose I offered you \$100,000 for those years,” he pressed. Again, I declined his offer, saying that I had things to do in the years ahead.

During the next ten years, my visits with President Tietjen were few and scattered. On each occasion he would refer back to the question asked in the beet field. He would say, “Will you take \$90,000 for the remaining nine years? Eighty thousand for the next eight?” And on it went until ten years were gone.

It didn’t take me the full decade to appreciate the profound lesson which my wonderful Church leader was trying to teach. He caused me to treasure those formative and crucial years between eighteen and twenty-eight. He also motivated me to make plans and to initiate actions that would enable me to claim the most of my opportunities.

Would You Sell?

As I look into your faces, I wonder what price or value you place upon the next ten years of your lives. Would you be willing to exchange a few of your years for money?

No, you cannot package a part of your life and transfer it to another. But you can, if you are not careful, squander the prospects of the immediate future. Just as Esau despised his birthright and sold it for a “morsel of meat,” so may you through neglect and myopic living forfeit all that the decade ahead has to offer (see Genesis 25:29–34; Hebrews 12:16–17).

There is a profound scripture in the Book of Mormon wherein reference is made to those who have been “called with a holy calling.” It is stated that these holy callings were given to selected people “on account of their faith,” good works, wise choices, and their reliance upon the Spirit of God. Others, according to the record, rejected the Spirit of God “on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren” (Alma 13:3–4).

Your privileges, opportunities, holy callings, and dreams can be snatched from your grasp by those twin thieves called “blindness of mind” and “hardness of heart.” They prey upon all members of Adam’s family, particularly the young—for these robbers know that the path of youth is slippery and full of risks.

Permit me, therefore, to suggest six specific ways of protecting yourselves and safeguarding your possibilities.

Avoid Blindness of Mind

Set Goals

First, you must avoid blindness of mind by setting goals. A person who sets realistic, attainable, yet challenging goals paints on the corridors of his mind a picture of what he can do and can become. This picture serves as a catalyst to every action taken in the direction of reaching established objectives. It beckons one

to move forward—not backward—and it pulls from the goal-striver the finest performance.

Without goals, how does one keep score? How does one know if he is winning or losing the game? What purpose would there be to the game of football if the goal line were erased or the crossbars in the end zone removed? Who would want to play basketball if the hoops and nets were taken down? What incentive would there be to dribble, pass, and screen if there were no means of making a goal?

The same applies to the game of life. Goals lend purpose and direction to our living. They excite imagination and stir interest, and they generate a strength of anticipation which can rally all the powers of one's soul. One man said:

Apathy can be overcome only by enthusiasm, and enthusiasm can be aroused by only two things: (1) an ideal (purpose or goal) that takes the imagination by storm; (2) a definite intelligible plan for carrying that ideal into practice. [Ward Cantrell]

God has an avowed purpose. It is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Moreover, he has a plan for the accomplishment of his stated goal, and we refer to that plan as the gospel of Jesus Christ. Added to all of this, note deity's goal-striving determination described in this scripture:

For God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round. [D&C 3:2]

I have long contended that the person who sets goals and who strives to attain such is the master of his own fate. On the other hand, the person without goals becomes the pawn of time, circumstance, and every wind of influence. President Kimball had this in mind when

he said, "I am convinced that unless we set goals, we move no place" (Regional Representatives' Seminar Address, April 3, 1975).

It is written, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). The same may be said of those who fail to set goals and who close their minds to a vision of the future. So I urge you to avoid blindness of mind by setting goals under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Fix them in your heart—visualize them in your mind—develop a plan of action—move forward without diffidence. Let one success lead you on to another. And slowly but surely you will become all and more than what you dreamed possible.

Follow Righteous Models

Second, you must avoid blindness of mind by following models of righteousness. Several years ago, in a general conference, President Kimball quoted these words of Walter MacPeck:

[Young men] need lots of heroes like Lincoln and Washington. But they also need to have some heroes close by. They need to know some man of towering strength and basic integrity, personally. They need to meet them on the street, to hike and camp with them, to see them in close-to-home, everyday, down-to-earth situations; to feel close enough to them to ask questions and to talk things over man-to-man with them. [Ensign May 1976, p. 47]

The same could be said of young women. All of us, it seems, need the strength and encouragement which only a role model can provide.

There are times when the road ahead becomes blurred in one's mind. Perhaps the goal is too far out of sight, or the obstacles over which one must jump block vision and give rise to the feeling, "I can't do it." At times like this a hero can ride to the rescue. His appearance on the scene assures us in these implied

words: “He did it! And if he can do it, I can too!”

You must be very cautious in the selection of a role model. You will want to pick someone who can be trusted—not someone with feet of clay. You will want to follow someone who walks the straight path—not someone who will lead you down strange roads.

When I think of modeling, I think of that great chief Captain Moroni. It was said of him:

If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts [and minds] of the children of men. [Alma 48:17]

I worry when I read the results of university polls, such as the one conducted at Brown University a few years ago. Under the caption “In Search of Heroes” it was reported that politicians (some good and some not so good) and a daredevil stuntman outscored the Savior of mankind.

How very fortunate you are to be on this campus where reliable role models are found in abundance! Many members of the BYU faculty have achieved high honors in their professional fields without compromising standards or surrendering a particle of faith. Their examples are inspiring, uplifting, and worthy of emulation.

I marvel at the wisdom Helaman displayed in naming his sons. As he bestowed the names Nephi and Lehi, he instructed:

I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good.

Therefore, my sons, I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and

also written, even as it has been said and written of them. [Helaman 5:6–7]

Yes, I urge you to avoid blindness of mind by following models of righteousness. Conduct this modeling with the words of the Savior in mind: “Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27).

Cultivate Gifts Within

Third, you must avoid blindness of mind by discovering and cultivating the gifts within. Paul advised Timothy, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee” (1 Timothy 4:14). The Apostle may have said this in reference to priesthood conferral and blessings. I personally believe, however, that there is a broader application.

Unless I am mistaken, one of the purposes of this university, and of other universities, is to help students discover their talents, interests, and special abilities. Such discoveries may come easily and early; others may surface painfully and much later. But the search must go on. Eventually, one’s potential contributions take focus, and the cultivation of the gifts becomes serious.

Precious time and energy can be wasted if in the probing for gifts, one is not perfectly honest with himself. There is the maxim which warns: “You can’t lead a cavalry charge if you think you look funny on a horse. If you *do* think you look funny on a horse, then postpone the charge” (Speigel’s Laws of Management). I would add, sell the horse and seek to lead out in some other way.

I suspect that many of you have wondered where you were when the gifts were distributed. Perhaps you even feel that you were completely overlooked. At times I have envied the gifts made apparent in the lives of others. I have wondered why I haven’t received more of an endowment. But as I have studied this subject and my knowledge of gifts has increased, I have repented of past feelings, for I know that

“to every man [and woman] is given a gift by the Spirit of God” (D&C 46:1). I also know that every man and woman has his or her own gift of God (see 1 Corinthians 7:7). Furthermore, I know that some may be given an abundance of gifts (see D&C 46:29).

We find in holy writ more than a casual invitation to obtain spiritual gifts. We are told to desire spiritual gifts, seek earnestly the best gifts, lay hold upon every good gift, and to apply ourselves to our own special gift (see 1 Corinthians 14:1; D&C 46:8; Moroni 10:30; D&C 8:4).

Gifts are not cast freely into the wind. They must be sought, they must be cultivated, they must be used to benefit others—for that is the condition upon which they are granted. Always bear in mind that they are reserved for those who love God and keep his commandments.

Is it possible that a gift lies dormant within you? Perhaps you haven’t mined deeply enough within the recesses of your soul to discover the “gold” that resides there. Maybe you haven’t heeded sufficiently the subtle intimations of the Spirit which provide clues to special and inner powers.

When a man ignores the spiritual dimension of his soul, he binds himself with the weaknesses of the flesh. But when he recognizes the divine spark within and allows that spark to be kindled by heavenly fires, almost limitless powers are unleashed. Moses did not become the great deliverer until spiritual powers were ignited within him; Joseph Smith, the young farm boy, did not become the prophet of the Restoration until he sought light and truth; and we will never rise to saintly heights until we seek gifts that will magnify our physical, mental, and spiritual capacities.

Avoid Hardness of Heart Obey Commandments

Fourth, you must avoid hardness of heart by obeying God’s commandments. A great man said on this campus:

We are too inclined to think of law as something . . . hemming us in. We sometimes think of law as the opposite of liberty. But that is a false conception. . . . God does not contradict Himself. He did not create man and then, as an afterthought, impose upon him a set of arbitrary, irritating, restrictive rules. He made man free—and then gave him the Commandments to keep him free.

We cannot break the Ten Commandments. We can only break ourselves against them—or else, by keeping them, rise through them to the fullness of freedom under God. God means us to be free. With divine daring, He gave us the power of choice. [Cecil B. DeMille, “The Greater Understanding,” BYU Commencement Address, 31 May 1957]

I regard each law and each commandment as an expression of God’s divine love. He loved us enough to provide some “thou shalt” and some “thou shalt not.” And on occasion he has simply challenged us to exercise judgment and to use wisdom. All is done by a loving Father in Heaven who warns and forewarns his children (see D&C 89:4).

With every commandment there are two certainties: (1) a promised blessing to the obedient; (2) a curse or forfeiture of blessing to the disobedient (see Deuteronomy 11:26–28). It is certain and simple. The choice is left to us.

You who are laying the foundations of future vocations or professions need to retain in memory the promise predicated upon your faithfulness, for the Lord has declared, “I . . . am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise” (D&C 82:10). You can perform beyond your natural abilities; you can accelerate your learning—providing you live in accord with God’s commandments.

In recent months a satanic attack has been launched against the young men and women of this Church. The leaders of this attack are largely apostates who seek to make people miserable like unto themselves. They mock

sacred covenants and saving ordinances. They sit in spacious buildings, puffed up in the pride of the world and would have the young and vulnerable believe that their worldly wisdom is superior to revealed religion.

Beware of such vipers, such faith pickpockets. They pretend to distill upon you corrective truths, when in reality they are stirring up “mists of darkness” which serve only to blind eyes, harden hearts, and lead precious souls away from the true and living God (see 1 Nephi 12:17). If there is virtue in such opposition, I find it very hard to identify. It could be related to this inspired thought:

*A ship, like a human being, moves best when it is slightly athwart the wind, when it has to keep its sails tight and attend its course. Ships, like men, do poorly when the wind is directly behind, pushing them sloppily on their way, so that no care is required in steering or in the management of sails; the wind seems favorable, for it blows in the direction one is heading, but actually it is destructive because it induces a relaxation in tension and skill. What is needed is a wind slightly opposed to the ship, for then tension can be maintained, and juices can flow and ideas can germinate, for ships, like men, respond to challenge. [James A. Michener, *Chesapeake* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1978), p. 566]*

I would have you remember that sin, ignorance, and error have a hardening influence upon the inner man—the heart—whereas obedience, knowledge, and truth liberate the soul and enable it to reach heights of greatness. Truly the righteous are favored of God (see 1 Nephi 17:35). I would say look to God, keep his commandments, and live.

Obey Parents And Leaders

Fifth, you must avoid hardness of heart by obeying parents and those priesthood leaders who have more than a casual interest in you. Since ancient times this requirement has appeared in the books: “Honour thy father

and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12).

A more recent statement reads, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. . . . (which is the first commandment with promise)” (Ephesians 6:1–2). Please note the words “in the Lord.” I interpret this to mean that a son or daughter is obligated to sustain and obey parents only in righteousness. Unrighteous dominion in parent-child relationships, I feel, is as reprehensible as it is in husband-wife relationships. One really does not sustain another when goodness is compromised.

Permit me to illustrate this point. A young man of faith practiced diligently and became a champion swimmer. He excelled to the point that scholarship offers from many universities were extended. One by one he turned them down. His father asked, “Son, why won’t you accept one of these free-ride scholarships?”

“I can’t,” the boy answered. “I’m going on a mission. It would not be honest for me to accept one and then drop it before the year is gone.”

Angrily the father shouted, “How foolish can you be? You are throwing away an opportunity of a lifetime!”

“I am sorry, Dad,” the boy added respectfully, “but I take seriously what the Lord said about his coming again. And, when he does come, I don’t want to be found in the swimming pool practicing the backstroke.”

I don’t mean to give the impression that parental advice is usually wrong and misdirected. This is not the case. Generally parents will give you counsel that is reliable. It is sparked by genuine love and given with your best interests in mind.

The same applies to the direction given by Church leaders. They too, have an investment in your well-being. Their role is to serve as shepherds to the flock—whether they be

fathers of wards, heads of quorums, or teachers in the home.

Perhaps we should view the obeying of parents as a preparatory duty. Did not Paul state:

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? [Hebrews 12:9]

Love of parents is akin to love of God. Obedience to parents, in the Lord, will soften hearts and make one more receptive to the will of God.

Obey Eternal Rhythm

Sixth, and finally, you must avoid hardness of heart by obeying the eternal rhythm. By this I mean that there is an orderly sequence of events in this life which must not be altered. The poet put it this way:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted. [Ecclesiastes 3:1–2]

I would add: a time to serve a mission, a time to marry, a time to explore fields of learning, and a time to specialize. Your professors would have me say: a time to study, a time to play, a time to attend class, and a time to be in the library.

President Kimball has addressed this subject. His words are:

One can have all the blessings if he is in control and takes the experiences in proper turn: first some limited social get-acquainted contacts, then his mission, then his courting, then his temple marriage and his schooling and his family, then his life's work. In any other sequence he could run into

difficulty. ["The Marriage Decision," Ensign, February 1975, p. 4]

Perhaps you are familiar with this splendid and thought-provoking account:

I remembered one morning when I discovered a cocoon in the bark of a tree, just as the butterfly was making a hole in its case and preparing to come out. I waited a while, but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it. I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened, the butterfly started slowly crawling out and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded back and crumpled; the wretched butterfly tried with its whole trembling body to unfold them. Bending over it, I tried to help it with my breath. In vain. It needed to be hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. My breath had forced the butterfly to appear, all crumpled, before its time. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, died in the palm of my hand.

That little body is, I do believe, the greatest weight I have on my conscience. For I realize today that it is a mortal sin to violate the great laws of nature. We should not hurry, we should not be impatient, but we should confidently obey the eternal rhythm. [Nikos Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek (New York: Ginn and Company, 1953), p. 120–21]

Concluding Words

Earlier in this presentation I shared with you a beet field conversation which I had with my stake president years ago. You will recall that I rejected his offer of \$100,000 for ten years of my life. Those years between eighteen and twenty-eight came and went like a dream in the night. Have you any idea what I would have lost had I been willing and able to sell?

- Two years of military service in World War II—a precious time of testing.

- Nearly three years in the Palestine and Syria Mission—an experience of eternal worth.
- Four years at the University of Utah—a precious learning and grooming time.
- My first year of teaching in the public schools—a time when gifts and interest reached a peak.
- And cradled within all of this is marriage to my childhood sweetheart and the birth of a daughter and a son.

Can you place a monetary value upon these formative years? No! They are priceless.

How much do the next ten years mean to you? Though my time is running out and yours is only beginning, I will not offer to buy that which is yours. I do, however, warn you in the spirit of helpfulness to guard against the wasting and squandering, and the forfeiture of your privileges. I have suggested that you must fight vigorously against two evil conditions, “blindness of mind” and “hardness of heart.” This can be done, as I have proposed, by setting goals, following models of

righteousness, discovering and cultivating the gifts within, obeying God’s commandments, obeying parents and Church leaders, and obeying the eternal rhythm.

In the words of a hymn:

*Time flies on wings of lightning;
We cannot call it back;
It comes, then passes forward
Along its onward track;
And if we are not mindful,
The chance will fade away;
For life is quick in passing.
'Tis as a single day.*

[R.B. Baird, *Hymns*, no. 73]

May you go forward with staunch faith and firm resolve, and do all that is necessary to avoid those “sad words of tongue or pen . . . ‘It might have been’ ” (John Greenleaf Whittier, *Maud Muller*, 1856). For this I pray in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.