

# *What Shall We Do Then?*

MARVIN J. ASHTON

**T**hank you, President Oaks, for your gracious introduction.

I am very pleased to meet with you wonderful students of Brigham Young University today and to express a few thoughts that I hope will be helpful.

As I have had the opportunity of meeting with a number of you over the past few weeks, I am impressed with your concern, even a grave concern, for those things that come into your lives over which you have no control. When tragedy, sorrow, setback, disappointment, humiliation, wealth, unusual success, acclaim, and recognition come into our lives, what shall we do then? How do we cope with the unexpected? How do we do our best to meet those challenges and situations? Often we say, "I wonder what I would do should that problem come into my life as it has into the life of my friend." How do we develop attitudes of strength that will see us through life's unexpected challenges?

At the time of John the Baptist and our Savior Jesus Christ, there were also those then who had grave concern about the personal uncertainties of their lives and their futures and what conduct would be acceptable to the Savior and the great forerunner John the Baptist. From Luke I share:

*And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? . . .*

*Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? . . .*

*And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? [Luke 3:10, 12, 14]*

It is my firm conviction that, when joy, sorrow, success, temporary failure, victory, hurt, misunderstanding, and loss come into our lives, what we do with them is the key to the future. What we do with what happens to us is more important than what happens to us. The direction in which we are moving is more important than place or situation. We may have stumbled or been grievously hurt, but we have not fallen if we are willing to get back up.

In preparation for my remarks today, I have asked some of you to help me. Some have written and shared questions and concerns. Many are on hand. All are greatly appreciated and worthy. Time today will permit me the opportunity of taking up only a few. Hopefully, from

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those selected, one problem may relate to you today, tomorrow, or in the future and give you strength. I would like to discuss them in keeping with the question from Luke 3:10 previously mentioned—"What shall we do then?"—and share with you examples of worthy people who have known what to do, with God's help, when the unexpected has struck.

### **Overcoming uncontrollable events**

The first question: "Sometimes happenings in life are cruel. You prepare, doing everything in your power to ready yourselves for tests and important events, and then the uncontrollable strikes, stripping you of your potential. What shall we do then?"

In responding to this question, I want to use one more question given to me. Here it is: "After much preparation and prayer for our first football bowl game, why did the Lord allow our first-string quarterback to receive injuries early in the contest and reduce our chances of victory as millions of viewers looked on? It could have been such a great missionary tool."

Perhaps the best way to answer that question is to review the facts. It's the first quarter, with BYU leading six to nothing. Sheide injures his shoulder. What shall we do then? Do we quit? No, we rally around a less experienced quarterback. We dig in. We play harder. We give it our all. We press for victory. We're seen by millions on television, and we are proud of that public exposure. The determined men representing the school then knew what to do and, thank the Lord, they did it. It was a good missionary tool. I saw maturity; I saw character; I saw quality on that football field. I commend Coach Edwards and his associates for knowing what to do and for "hanging in there tough." (I am pleased to note that Coach Edwards was selected as the Utah Sportsman of the Year yesterday for his record and for his image.)

### **Understanding tragic deaths**

The second question: "Recently we have been shocked at the tragic deaths of full-time missionaries. What shall we do, as family members and friends, in relationship to our Heavenly Father when this is allowed to strike us?"

Some of you from Honolulu knew Tony Sanchez. Others, like President Golden K. Driggs, who is in attendance today, knew him in the Louisiana Shreveport Mission. I never knew Tony Sanchez as a missionary. I only knew him as a hospital patient in the St. Francis Hospital in Honolulu, where his stake president took me to see him following a serious injury on a tricky bar or recreation bar while serving in the mission field. He had fallen and broken his back. Now he was resting motionless in the hospital. What could we say to give him comfort and hope? As we walked into his room, we met his mother standing at his side. Tony was completely immobile, unable to talk. I think the only thing he was able to move at that time was his eyeballs. While I was wondering what I should say to Tony and to his mother, his mother spoke first and said, "Elder Ashton, I have always wanted to be a nurse, and I have never had the opportunity. Now I am a nurse to my injured son." Later she said, "Elder Ashton, I hope we will be blessed with the privilege of sending our other son into the mission field. Just because we have had this tragedy is no reason why our other son should be deprived, is it?" I understand, following the death of Tony in that hospital a few days later, that the mother, the father, and the entire family have their desire. Tony's brother James is in the Language Training Mission on campus today, preparing himself to go to South America on a mission. It was interesting when someone said, "Could I help with funds for James's mission?"

The family said, "No. We have a little money left over from Tony's insurance, and that is going toward his brother's mission." This is a tremendous example of courage and character

in action. What shall we do then? The Sanchez family knew well what to do and did it.

### **Dealing with challenges in marriage**

The third question: “I am about to marry. My husband-to-be and I want nothing more than continuing happiness throughout our marriage. We know that unforeseen challenges and even disappointments may come. If tragedy strikes our marriage, what shall we do then?”

Last month Sister Zina Card Brown, wife of Elder Hugh B. Brown of the Council of the Twelve, passed away. At the time, they had been married sixty-six years. Let me share Elder Brown’s thoughts expressed just a few weeks before her passing:

*Eight years ago my sweetheart, Zina, suffered a massive stroke that took her speech and left her paralyzed. The doctors said she probably would not survive the week. As our children surrounded her bed, I pled with the Lord to spare her life. Then I spoke to her, though she was unconscious. I reminded her that through the years of our married courtship we had planned and hoped to take the final trip together. I told her I wanted what was best for her and our Father’s will, but life would seem so empty without her presence. I think the Lord in his mercy permitted Zina her choice—she could travel on into immortality and rest, or remain to bless us with her exhibition of quiet faith, patience, and fortitude. Characteristically, she chose to do what she knew would give me greatest comfort, unmindful of her own tribulation. Hers is truly a Christ-like love. Our entire family has been blessed and benefited by her unselfish sacrifice in our behalf. Noble characters do not alone bear trouble; they use it.*

### **Helping inactive Church members**

The fourth question: “Some of our closest friends are not totally committed to the Church. The fellows don’t honor their priesthood, and the girls are only conveniently active. We like them for what they are. We don’t want to strain our choice relationships.

Talk seems to do no good at all. What shall we do then?”

In answer to this question, shortly before Christmas we had the opportunity of going to the hospital at the request of a mother whose fifty-five-year-old son was seriously ill. As we met with them and tried to give them comfort, the fifty-five-year-old patient’s nephew was in the hospital room as well. The afflicted one’s wife said, “Elder Ashton, would it be possible for you to give my husband a blessing?” I nodded approval and looked in the direction of the thirty-year-old nephew and said, “Are you an elder?”

He said, “Yes, I am an elder, but don’t ask me to put my hands on his head. I am not worthy to participate in a blessing with you.”

As he backed away, I said, “Roland, how would you like to try to be worthy for ten minutes? Couldn’t you be worthy for a few minutes while you help me give this needed blessing?”

He nodded his head and said, “I think I can be worthy for a few minutes.”

While he was walking close to the side of the bed, I said, “If you can do it for ten minutes, you can do it for thirty minutes.”

He said, “Yes.”

I said, “If you can do it for thirty minutes, you can do it for a day, can’t you?” About then I felt he figured we had better get on with the blessing or he would be committed. We gave his uncle a blessing, and when it was over he said, “Thank you for letting me share this blessing with you. No one has ever put it up to me like this before. I will try to be worthy.”

I leave you that story in answer to this question. Perhaps, my friends, the best way to help some of our associates who are not quite as active as they should be is to involve them. I don’t know of anything that would be more important and have more impact upon an inactive person than to have you call and say, “Would you help me to administer to my wife,

my roommate, or my friend?" Give him an opportunity to make shaping up a process.

### **Coping with terminal illness**

The fifth question: "Terminal illnesses like cancer seem to be striking with more frequency among our age group. We fast, pray, and try to help families so afflicted but feel so helpless. What shall we do then?"

I would like to share a mother's comment as she was tending a twenty-nine-year-old daughter, Christine Jacobsen Cannon, buried Saturday. The mother said, "We thank our Heavenly Father we have had her for all of 1974. We count each day a bonus. How close we have become during her critical illness. We are filling every hour with the most we can." I had the opportunity of seeing faith, courage, character, and fight in one so sorely afflicted with this terminal disease. I thank her for what she did for me in exhibiting the answer to "what shall we do then?"

### **Preventing arrogance**

The sixth question: "I have been somewhat successful in school with grades, popularity, leadership recognition, and other things. I am proud and pleased with these developments, but I am concerned about becoming self-sufficient and even arrogant. When I feel the dangers of these possibilities, what shall I do then?"

I am reminded of what President Spencer W. Kimball said at the dedication of the Washington Temple:

*Bless all people, our Father, that they may prosper, but not more than their faith can stand. . . . Our Father, in blessing Thy people with prosperity, we pray that they may not be surfeited with flocks and herds and acres and barns and wealth which could bring them to worship these false gods.*

Taking freedom with President Kimball's admonition, may I, for our purpose today, say,

"Oh God, do not bless us with more stocks, bonds, properties, automobiles, or credit cards than our faith can stand or more than our parents can bear." A worthy prayer, fellow students: "Dear God, in all the days ahead, please bless me with what I need and can stand, not with what I want."

I am thinking of Johnny Miller, a former BYU student and probably the greatest golfer in the world today. What is it they are calling him today—"twenty-five under Miller"? The greatest challenge he has today is how to handle, how to meet, and how to cope with success. I pray the Lord will help this wonderful young man. He said his next goal is to shoot in the fifties. I want him to know I am a little ahead of him. I am going to shoot in the forties. Coaches Carl Tucker and Floyd Miller of the BYU staff have indicated I might make that in the spring. If I do, I am going back and play the *back nine!*

"Bless us, O God, that we may not have more success than we can stand." I know some say, "I would like to have that challenge"; but, believe me, it is real and difficult. Knowing how to cope with what happens to us, good or bad, is a continuing challenge.

### **Avoiding self-pity**

The seventh question: "With each passing day I miss my mother more. She was taken from us in death when I was ten. I know it is not wise, but on occasion I allow myself pity and poor-performance excuses for this loss in my life. When I get in these moods, what shall I do then?"

A friend of mine lost his mother when he was eleven. He almost died at thirteen with typhoid fever. Then smallpox almost took him later on in his teens. Later cancerous throat conditions and an operation took away his voice. Bell's palsy of the face muscles followed this affliction. Heart deterioration made heart surgery necessary at age seventy-seven. Do you know who my friend is? President Spencer

W. Kimball. I bear witness today that one of the reasons he is a prophet is because, with God's help, under every condition he has known what to do.

As we go through the rest of the days of our lives, now is the time for decision making. What am I going to do about it? What are you going to do about it? When tomorrow comes with challenges, opportunities, successes, joys, or disappointments, we must be ready to perform effectively when what shall we do then becomes now.

We are all different. God in his wisdom has so created us. Only we can determine what we will do with what happens to us. What we do with what happens to us is more important than what happens to us. Certainly with God's help we can do what is right.

What shall we do then? Let us resolve to so live that the Lord can say to us, as he did to the Prophet Joseph Smith in some of his darkest, most trying hours: "My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph" (D&C 121:7-8).

God lives. He is our Father. He knows us. He stands ready to help us. He has placed us here in life to see what we will do under all conditions and situations. It is a time of trial, tribulation, and testing. Often we would prefer to have "this cup pass" rather than go through the consequences. We must never lose sight of the fact that often success, popularity, and fame

are more difficult to live with than uneventful calm or even tragedy. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8) or the things he experienced.

We came into this life for experience, and that's all we can take out of it. Thank God we have the right to decide personally and individually what we shall do then. The future does belong to those who know what to do with it. Look forward to the unknown with optimism and confidence. Look to tomorrow with happy expectancy, realizing that with God's help you can do all things. You and your Heavenly Father can make right decisions together, and with his companionship, I promise you success.

I leave you my witness that Jesus is the Christ. God is our Father. Spencer W. Kimball is a prophet of God. If you would know what to do in the days ahead, follow the counsel and leadership of the prophet of God. I again bear witness to you that we have no need to fear. The only thing we have to fear is what we are going to do with what comes, not what comes.

May our Heavenly Father help you to go forward with a firm resolve that you are bigger than anything that can happen to you. With God's help, you can be victorious. Resolve now that you will make proper decisions and carry them out to the benefit of yourself and those who depend upon you, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.