

Looking to the Future

ROBERT L. BACKMAN

What a glorious experience it is for me to stand at this pulpit in the presence of so many of God's noble sons and daughters, my brothers and sisters in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I love you dearly! I sense faith and good works in you and face the future with keen anticipation as I contemplate your devotion to righteousness and your desire to serve the Lord and your fellowmen. I hope you draw strength and courage from one another in this setting and in your daily contacts with one another on this great campus. And I pray that you are looking forward to the future with the assurance and serenity that God will guide you through this life and back to his presence if you will keep his commandments.

Looking at you, I know that the future is safe.

I would like to speak to you about the future and something of your role in it.

In a recent *Peanuts* cartoon, Charlie Brown approached his psychiatrist, Lucy, for some advice about life.

Lucy: Life, Charlie Brown, is like a deck chair.

Charlie: Like a what?

Lucy: Have you ever been on a cruise ship?

Passengers open up these canvas deck chairs so they can sit in the sun. Some people place their chairs facing the rear of the ship so they can see

where they've been. . . . Other people face their chairs forward. . . . They want to see where they are going. On the cruise ship of life, Charlie Brown, which way is your deck chair facing?

Charlie: I've never been able to get one unfolded!

[Charles M. Schultz, "Peanuts," *Salt Lake Tribune*]

Opening and Closing Doors

If you woke up early enough this morning, you saw the old Roman god Janus opening up the mighty door of the heavens to let the day come in once again. Tonight a bit after sunset you will see old Janus close the portals again as day passes through. At least this would have been your interpretation if you have lived in ancient Rome.

And probably you would have had occasion to visit the special domain of Janus quite often throughout the day. Every time you entered a gate or door or exited, you would have been within his special province among the gods. For Janus was the god of gates, doorways, entrances, and exits. As time passed, his domain extended to include symbolic

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openings and closings as well. Beginnings and endings were all watched over by Janus.

His symbol as depicted on the Roman coins had two faces, one looking each way—forward and back. The shrine of Janus, which was built by the Roman ruler Numa Pompilius, consisted of two great gates, one facing east and one facing west; one for beginnings and one for endings [see *Encyclopedia Americana*, International Edition, s. v. “Janus”].

Old Janus is still very much with us today in the month that bears his name. The month in which we symbolically look backward and close the door on the old year and look forward to open another one. Janus’s month, of course, is January.

For all the mythology and superstition connected with this old two-faced god, there is wisdom in what he symbolized. It is good to have times in our lives when we can close one period and open another. If our past has been triumphant and successful, well and good. We should enjoy it and hark back to it occasionally for warm memories. But we cannot live in it. We cannot rest on the laurels of our past accomplishments.

When Kirk Douglas, the movie actor, was awarded an Emmy for a dramatic role he had played on television, he responded with these words: “I keep asking myself, ‘What I have done lately?’ ”

Growth is a ruling law of life. Unless we grow, we begin to die, and one of the best ways to grow is to close the books on our past accomplishments and go forth and do something else.

Perhaps an even greater gift from old Janus, the god of the gates, is the opportunity to close the door on past failures, disappointments, pain, grief, and unhappiness. We need not dwell on past failures as Lucy likes to do.

I saw a cartoon which showed Charlie Brown approaching Lucy with a whole list of New Year’s resolutions.

“You’re going to be proud of me, Lucy. I’ve decided that this next year is going to be my year of decision. This is a list of things in my life I’m going to correct. I’m going to be a better person.”

Then Lucy starts in: *“Not me. I’m going to spend this whole year regretting the past. It’s the only way, Charlie Brown. I’m going to cry over spilt milk and sigh over lost loves. It’s a lot easier. It’s too hard to improve. I tried it once, and it drove me crazy. Forget the future is my motto. Regret the past. Oh, how I regret the past! Why did I do that? Why did I do that? Why? I regret it all. Oh, what regrets! Oh, what remorse! Oh, what anguish!”*

Poor old Charlie throws his resolutions over his shoulder. [Charles M. Schultz, “Peanuts,” Salt Lake Tribune]

Another bit of wisdom from this mythological door minder is the idea that we can and do live between portals. It is possible for us to open and to close the doors of our lives whenever we choose. Sometimes we procrastinate the closing and opening of our doors. Habits we would like to break, new projects we would like to embark on, great things we say we are going to do—someday. But that someday will never come unless we choose to close the door on old past patterns that are not working for us and open the door on new opportunities.

And of course we needn’t wait until we finish school or until the children are grown or until we retire from our work. New doors can be opened any time we choose, and old ones can be closed—even today. What better time to open new doors than at the beginning of a new year—to begin today to be the person you want to be—to surpass yourself, to live life more abundantly as God would have you do? The future is beyond our grasp unless we take advantage of today.

New Frontiers

The future? There are those who claim there will be no future, that there are no new frontiers to conquer, that the world is doomed, that mankind will be annihilated.

In the words of the great industrialist, Charles Kettering, “We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there” (*Seed for Thought*, 1949).

I have heard the voices of doomsayers and pessimists ever since I was young:

“The four-minute mile is beyond our physical capacity.”

“Television in our own living rooms?”

“Man walk on the moon?”

“Split the atom?”

“Conquer small-pox?”

When he produced the Model T Ford, Henry Ford is reported to have said that we would never improve on that car.

The Boeing 247 revolutionized air transportation. That twin-engine, all-metal transport cost \$68,000, about one-third of the cost for the electronic gear on a present-day jetliner. The day the new Boeing transport first flew, a proud company engineer predicted: “They’ll never build them any bigger.” (The Boeing 747 carries more stewardesses than the B 247 carried passengers.)

One survey indicated that the biggest challenge facing our youth in the ‘80s is that there are no new exciting frontiers to conquer (report of Robert Johnston Co., Inc., on the teen environment from a study undertaken for National Board of Junior Achievement).

New frontiers to conquer?

Consider the vistas opened to us by the following:

1. The artificial heart implanted in Dr. Barney Clark.
2. Space exploration.
3. The advance in communication and transportation.
4. Increased knowledge of the chemistry of our bodies.
5. The use of atomic energy.
6. The computer age.

Isn’t it interesting that *Time* magazine, instead of selecting a Man of the Year, chose a Machine of the Year, The Computer? It was an indication that an “information revolution” has arrived, bringing the promise of dramatic changes in the way people live and work, perhaps even in the way they think. We will never be the same.

Did you realize that the first electronic digital computer built in the United States dates back only to the end of World War II? Created at the University of Pennsylvania, it weighed 30 tons and contained 18,000 vacuum tubes, which failed at an average of every 7 minutes. The arrival of the transistor and the miniaturized circuit made it possible to reduce that room-size computer to a silicon chip the size of a pea. That’s beyond my comprehension. Today more than half of all employed Americans earn their living, not by producing things, but as “knowledge workers,” exchanging various kinds of information.

Yet a well-known analyst, Ubric Weil, says “The surface is barely scratched” (*Time*, 3 January 1983, p. 14).

7. And what about relations among our fellowmen and nations?

Did you know that more than half the people of the world still live in conditions approaching misery? Their food is inadequate; they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their abject poverty is a handicap and threat to both them and us.

Is there anything left to do? Lincoln Steffens reminded us:

I teach my child and I tell other children of all ages—pre-school, in school, in college, and out:

That nothing is done, finally and right.

That nothing is known, positively and completely.

That the world is theirs, all of it. It is full of all sorts of things for them to find out and do, or do over and do right. . . .

That we have not now and never have had in the history of the world a good government.

That there is not now and never has been a perfectly run railroad, school, newspaper, bank, theater, factory, grocery store; that no business is or ever has been built, managed, financed, as it should be, must be and will be, someday—possibly in their day.

That what is true of business and politics is gloriously true of the professions, the arts and crafts, the sciences, the sports. That the best picture has not yet been painted; the greatest poem is still unsung; the mightiest novel remains to be written; the divinest music has not been conceived even by Bach. In science, probably 99 percent of the knowable has to be discovered. We know only a few streaks about astronomy. Chemistry and physics are little more than a sparkling mass of questions. As for the sports, young men and women are beating our old records every year. . . .

. . . [Young people] are glad, as I am, that there is something left for them to discover and say and think and do. Something? There is everything. [Lincoln Steffens, “Unfinished Business,” *Reader’s Digest*, January 1937, pp. 1–2]

8. And let us not forget our obligation to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world—most of whom know little or nothing about our Savior.

The seventeenth-century mathematician and philosopher, Rene Descartes, expressed the excitement we should feel as we contemplate the future. He said: “There is nothing so removed from us as to be beyond our reach, or so hidden that we cannot discover it” (quoted by John Young, astronaut, after landing on the moon in 1974).

The future?

We are living in the most exciting, explosive, dynamic, dramatic dispensation in the history of the world! What a time to be preparing for life! I envy all of you the years ahead of you and pray you will be ready for these rich adventures.

Please remember, however, that the future is beyond our grasp unless we take advantage of today, opening new doors to growth and accomplishment.

Gospel Brings Great Opportunities

And who has a greater opportunity to do just that than you choice sons and daughters of God, blessed with the gospel of Jesus Christ, the holy priesthood, the advantage of attending this great university where all you learn is coupled with spiritual values? What a responsibility lies on your shoulders to open the door to progress and truth for yourselves and for your fellowmen!

The Lord gave all of us who are members of his Church an awesome commission as we prepare for life:

And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.

Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand;

Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms—

That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you. [D&C 88:77–80; emphasis added]

Note his words—“that ye may be prepared in all things”!

How are you doing?

Daniel Webster said, “Every man must educate himself. His books and teachers are but helps; the work is his” (quoted by Earl

Nightingale, "Your Job," *Success Unlimited*, June 1980, p. 41).

The trouble with most of us is that we so underestimate our ability and our potential that we go through life without ever sensing what we could have accomplished. We never get our deck chairs unfolded.

In an article entitled "Reflections on Human Potential," Dr. Harold R. McAlindon told of Professor Abraham Maslow, who used to try to inspire learning in his pupils by asking them, "Which of you is going to write the next great novel? Who is going to be a saint like Albert Schweitzer?" When his students were faced with these questions, they would blush, squirm, and giggle. He would then ask them, "If not you, who will?" He pointed out that there are times when each of us has flashes of inspiration to do something really worthwhile, but upon contemplating it, we just develop a "Who me? Whom am I kidding?" attitude. What we do not realize is the fact that all the people who have done something worthwhile for great numbers of people had this same kind of self-doubt and humility. However, they worked right through it.

A friend of mine served as a mission president in Europe. One day his twelve-year-old son came home with a sheaf of music under his arm. His mother asked: "Mark, what are you doing with all that music?"

Mark replied: "They just made me the branch Primary organist."

Shocked, the mother said: "But you don't play that well."

Mark responded: "I'm the best they've got!"

Henry Ford added: "One of the great discoveries a man makes, one of his great surprises, is to find he can do what he was afraid he couldn't do. Most of the bars we beat against are in ourselves—we put them there, and we can take them down" (quoted by Earl Nightingale, "Your Job," *Success Unlimited*, June 1980, p. 41).

None of you knows what life has in store. There are few people who can predict the future. In 1938 President Franklin Roosevelt assembled the brightest scientists in America, brought them to the White House to help him envisage the things he might have to adjust to in the future. "I want you to tell me what to expect," he begged.

After three days of intense speculation, these men whose job it was to anticipate the future and who commanded more keys to that future than any other group failed to predict atomic power, radar, rockets, jet aircraft, computers, xerography, and penicillin, all of which were to burst upon the world within the next few years. They knew about the exploratory research, of course, but they could not believe it would produce functional products so soon.

I am grateful that I could always count on the Lord's guidance in what I did in my life. None of us knows life's length; none of us knows its breadth, what experiences lie ahead, even where we will live. Some of you don't yet know whom or if you will even marry. Looking back on my own life, I marvel at the rich adventures I have enjoyed, much of it unanticipated and unexpected. Believe me, if I had my choice, I would not have programmed some of those experiences. Let me give you an example:

I was drafted during the Second World War and took my basic infantry training at Camp Wolters near Mineral Wells, Texas. We believed that after training at Camp Wolters, anyplace was an improvement, even combat. Trained in heavy weapons, I was immediately sent to war in the Pacific. Can you imagine my feelings as I watched the Golden Gate disappear in the distance?

The day before we shipped out, I received a telegram announcing the birth of our baby daughter. If I had not received that telegram then, I would not have known of her birth for four months because it took that long for my

mail to catch up with me overseas. I really was discouraged. Why was this happening to me? What had I done to deserve this? Would I ever be able to hold my baby in my arms? Would I ever see this land again? How would I ever survive the war?

And yet, my young brothers and sisters, looking back, I count that chapter in my life as one of the most character building in all my years. I learned so much. I gained a real appreciation for my wife and family during that separation. I developed a deep love for my country and my home in the mountains. After a few months in the tropical heat of New Guinea, I even appreciated the blizzards of winter. I realized how adaptable I could be under any circumstance and how essential it is to be in control of my life instead of victimized by my circumstances. I learned to take advantage of every day, living it the best I could, grateful I was alive.

I came to the realization of my absolute dependence on my loving Father in Heaven and counted on his inspiration, guidance, and consolation. I recognized what a sublime gift my Savior had given me through his living ministry, his death, and his resurrection. I was grateful for the guidance that the gospel gave me and understanding of the purpose of life. I returned from that war a better man, better prepared for life.

I am grateful I could always count on the Lord's guidance and the assurance that all of those experiences, good or bad, have been to prepare me to return to his presence. I love to read the word of the Lord to Joseph Smith while he was a prisoner in Liberty Jail. After being imprisoned, persecuted, and tortured for months, the Prophet prayed: "O God, where art thou?" In response to his petition, the Lord replied:

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 over all thy foes. [D&C 121:7–8]

The Lord assured him that all of the torment and persecution he faced would be for his experience and for his good, then gave him this comforting assurance:

Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever. [D&C 122:9]

My challenge to you is to prepare for life by seizing the opportunities you enjoy right now, making the most of every experience that comes your way. The Lord has reminded us that if we are prepared we shall not fear.

Aren't you grateful for a gospel that encourages us to learn, study, grow, mature, magnify, increase, expand, progress—forever? Our belief in eternal progression is one of the most satisfying and motivating principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It signifies to me that, no matter how old I am, the future is still full of challenging growth experiences. It provides a magnificent obsession for all who believe.

Consider the impact these inspired statements have on us as members of Christ's church:

The glory of God is intelligence. [D&C 93:36]
It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance. [D&C 131:6]

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come. [D&C 130:18–19]

Brigham Young told us how vast the gospel is:

I will tell you in a few words what I understand “Mormonism” to be. . . . It embraces every fact there is in the heavens and in the heaven of heavens—every fact there is upon the surface of the earth, in the bowels of the earth, and in the starry heavens; in fine, it embraces all truth there is in all the eternities of the Gods. . . . “Mormonism” embraces all truth that is revealed and that is unrevealed, whether religious, political, scientific, or philosophical. [JD 9:149]

Obviously God expects us to use our minds, to stretch our intellects, to think. Unfortunately, “some people would rather die than think—and some do.”

Yes, my young brothers and sisters, I encourage you to seek an education, stretch your minds, and develop your skills as much as you can.

Warning Must Be Sounded

But I want to sound a warning to you. Hear the wisdom of the prophet Nephi:

O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profitteth them not. And they shall perish.

But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God. [2 Nephi 9:28–29]

I could give you no better advice than that given to Henry Eyring by his father as he left the farm to attend his freshman year at the University of Arizona:

So you’re going to Tucson to study science, eh? Well now, that’s what you want to do, isn’t it? I don’t know much about science, son, but I know

quite a bit about some other things. I do know the Lord spoke to the Prophet and that the gospel is true. I know our gospel teaches truth regardless of its source. Now, I’ve tried to tell you the way things look to me, and perhaps sometimes I’ve told you things that don’t exactly jibe with the truth. If I have, just discard those things. In this Church you don’t have to believe anything that isn’t true. If you want to be a scientist, son, you hit it just as hard as you can. You’re going to hear some things up there that don’t exactly jibe with what you’ve learned in Sunday School, but don’t worry about it. Just keep an open mind and truth will eventually work its way to the surface. I don’t worry about how much you learn. Study all the science you can, and if you remember your prayers and don’t profane and live in such a way that you will feel comfortable in the company of good people, then mother and I will feel good about you going. Don’t you worry about the gospel, son. It will stand the test of all truth. [The Search for Truth in Science and Religion (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1961), pp. 13–14]

Yes, we want you to get an education, to achieve academic excellence, to master a trade or a profession, to gain economic and social advantages—but we want you to do all that you do to prepare for life in the context of Latter-day Saint values. The Lord counseled:

And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. [D&C 88:118; emphasis added]

Why an Education?

Most of us enter college primarily to help us in the job market or to gain social stature or to find a mate or to avoid manual labor. Sometimes we miss the real purpose of education. President Tanner told a story of a university professor addressing

A group of students who had just closed their college life. . . . At a final dinner before separating to go their various ways, he said, referring to the furnishings and services which graced the banquet table, "Take this tablecloth. It is of most exquisite workmanship. It involved weaving, bleaching, smoothing, designing. It is damask linen. Is there anyone here who knows from personal experience anything about the labor involved? Have any of you ever contributed any labor to the manufacturing of table linen? Let me draw your attention to the samples of pottery here. Surely the men and women who produce such beautiful things are artists. What a joy it must be for a man to hold a thing in his hand—complete—and say, 'I made it.' Many forms of labor are involved here, also—digging the clay, carting, fashioning, painting, burning, baking, and finishing."

He then called attention to the cut glass, the silver, the rugs, the carpet, the curtains and drapery, and the mural decorations. He continued, "Here we are, then, a group of men on whom a university has set its stamp. We produce nothing to eat; we could not even lend a hand in the making of anything we see around us; and truth compels me to venture the suggestion that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the chief motive of a college education is to escape actual participation in just such a work as gives, or ought to give, joy to the worker."

"I do not believe that a smattering of languages, of mathematics, and of history is education. I believe the system of cramming these things to pass an examination is pernicious." Then he said, "Why should men consider it degrading to handle tools and make useful and beautiful things?"

He concluded his remarks to his spellbound audience with these words: "Gentlemen, as one example, I wish it were possible for me to introduce to you a young Galilean carpenter, the master builder—Jesus of Nazareth." [G. Homer Durham, ed., N. Eldon Tanner, His Life and Service (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), p. 341]

The highest purpose of education is to develop character.

True education trains in discipline, self-denial, and self-mastery.

True education awakens a desire to promote and conserve health of body and mind.

True education regulates the temper, subdues passion, and makes obedience to social laws and moral order a guiding principle of life.

True education encourages service to our fellowmen.

True education develops reason and inculcates faith in God.

True education motivates us to strive to live like our Savior.

There is no end to the progress of man or a woman who seeks learning, who seeks the truth, even by study and also by faith.

In fact, the Lord has told us in no uncertain words that, as we establish priorities in our lives, we should have no other gods before him. Then he promised in the beautiful Sermon on the Mount, as correctly translated by Joseph Smith: "Wherefore, seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (JST Matthew 6:38)

All what things? The Lord was speaking of the treasures of the earth, the things of this world.

Blessed with testimonies of the gospel of Jesus Christ, you and I can understand the purpose of life and our eternal goals. That blessed testimony gives us the proper perspective and motivation as we seek for wisdom and understanding. We have the truth and we practice virtue. That sets us apart from the rest of the world which tries to find truth without practicing virtue, and thus is ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (see 2 Timothy 3:7).

Armed with faith in God, his Son Jesus Christ, and the saving principle of his gospel, you will be prepared to live in the world without being part of the world.

You will then study—along with your science, politics, and business—the holy scriptures.

You will pray earnestly, sincerely, from the heart, seeking guidance for your life, building your faith in God and understanding of your relationship to him.

You will fast purposefully, thoughtfully, prayerfully, regularly.

You will live his holy principles, keep his commandments, the true test of your faith.

You will respond to calls to service in his kingdom, experiencing the joy that comes from such service.

You will sustain and follow your leaders, confident that they are inspired in their callings.

You will bear witness of the gospel through your words and actions, sharing the truth with your fellowmen.

You will seek his Holy Spirit, knowing that the things of God are understood only by the Spirit of God.

You will be honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, doing good to all men.

You will love your neighbors as yourself, even those you don't like.

You will continue to seek anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy.

You will be a devoted Latter-day Saint throughout your life.

You will then be prepared for the future, prepared in all things to magnify the calling whereunto God has called you and the mission with which he has commissioned you.

And at the end of your rich, productive life you will be greeted with the assuring words of our Lord:

Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. [Matthew 25:21]

Hail and Farewell

At the beginning of this new year, my beloved brothers and sisters, I pray with all my heart and soul that you will understand that, as children of God with knowledge of your identity, your relationship to him, your relationship to your Savior Jesus Christ, your understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the purpose for which we are here, each one of you will take advantage of every day to prepare for life, that you can enjoy it more abundantly. God bless you with all you stand in need of as you study the principles to guide you through life. In your scholastic career, in your religious career, in your social career, God bless you to have the patience to stand by your convictions, to prepare yourself for something worthwhile in your life. God bless you with the faith to know you truly are his sons and daughters commissioned to come to this earth when you have come because you have such great talents and abilities to build his holy kingdom. God bless you to sense, in the great windup scene in which we find ourselves in this dispensation of the fullness of times, that you have an important role to play. God bless you to be where he can find you, that your lives can be rich and full and rewarding and fulfilling. The gospel is true! I bear that witness and pray that you will anchor your faith in that glorious gospel in all you undertake in your life. I love you as my brothers and sisters in Christ and pray his holy Spirit to attend you in all you do. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.