

The Unique Opportunities of Living at This Time in This Dispensation

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I can remember only one occasion in all the opportunities I've had to speak in which they actually raised the podium before I spoke. I'm reminded of the first talk I ever gave as a member of a stake presidency eleven and a half years ago. I stood up to the podium and then asked the other counselor and the president to stand next to me. They were both over six feet tall, and I'm not quite six feet tall—I'm five foot something. The whole congregation burst out laughing, which is the reaction I expected, because then I quoted one of my favorite scriptures: "And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things" (1 Nephi 16:29). That's actually an underlying theme for my remarks, because I speak today of the unique opportunities that come with living at this time in this dispensation. When I walk the sidewalks of this campus I am often impressed with the innate goodness that radiates from you. There is divine purpose in people of your caliber being on the earth during times like these.

I begin by bearing my testimony that the man who stood at this pulpit two weeks ago, even President Thomas S. Monson, is God's prophet for this time. My hope is to expound upon his words by following the dictates of that same Spirit that directed him.

When I joined the Church at the end of my junior year in high school, I set three goals for myself:

1. Marry the woman of my dreams in the holy temple and create an eternal family.
2. Go to BYU to become a teacher.
3. Serve a full-time mission.

Here's how I have fared so far.

Over thirty-five years ago I asked a wonderful woman to take a chance on me. I had to ask her twice, and fortunately she said yes the second time. Kim is accompanying me today, along with some of our children, their spouses, and some of our grandchildren.

I have been privileged to obtain not one but two degrees at this institution and to spend thirty-two years of my professional life dedicated to the education of children. Part of those thirty-two years have been spent here—an opportunity that I could scarcely have imagined at the time I set my original goals. I love this institution.

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Concerning my third goal, two years after joining the Church I was called to serve a mission in Australia—the context for which I will use to set the stage for the remainder of my remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson said recently:

I repeat what prophets have long taught—that every worthy, able young man should prepare to serve a mission. Missionary service is a priesthood duty—an obligation the Lord expects of us who have been given so very much. [“As We Meet Together Again,” Ensign, November 2010, 5–6]

This doctrine has been taught since at least 1974. President Spencer W. Kimball said:

The question is frequently asked: Should every young man fill a mission? And the answer has been given by the Lord. It is “Yes.” Every young man should fill a mission. . . .

. . . Every man should also pay his tithing. Every man should observe the Sabbath. Every man should attend his meetings. Every man should marry in the temple. [“When the World Will Be Converted,” Ensign, October 1974, 8]

I remember hearing those words for the first time as a freshman here at BYU. I had been told previously that not every young man was allowed to serve a mission, even if he wanted to, so when I heard President Kimball’s prophetic words, I felt assured that I would be able to accomplish my goal. Yes, I get to serve a mission!

I have often pondered that period of my life in the context of the larger picture provided by the history of this dispensation. When the early members of the Church faced extreme difficulties traversing this continent, they were responding to the counsel of a living prophet. Although they recognized the reasons why they were doing so, I doubt very many of them thought about the legacy they were leaving behind for future generations as they pulled

a handcart over a troublesome rock, faced early winters, or coaxed tired oxen to continue forward. I also doubt that they could have predicted that they would be known and honored by future generations of this dispensation in the manner we remember and honor them now.

I have wondered what my generation will be known for in this final gospel dispensation. Perhaps we might be known, among other things, as the generation that responded to the call of a prophet that every young man should serve a mission—a response requiring great sacrifice on the part of both young men and young women and their families. History records that as a result of this sacrifice there was an almost immediate doubling of the full-time missionary force.

Now I ask you, what might your generation be known for?

Because “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11), as righteousness grows in the earth so does wickedness. It is as President Brigham Young said:

The devil is just as much opposed to Jesus now as he was when the revolt took place in heaven. And as the devil increases his numbers by getting the people to be wicked, so Jesus Christ increases his numbers and strength by getting the people to be humble and righteous. [JD 4:38]

I suggest the amount of wickedness *and* the degree of wickedness are both increasing in our time. This means that staying on the Lord’s side is becoming increasingly difficult, and nowhere is this difficulty more apparent than in the adversary’s attacks on the family.

President Spencer W. Kimball said:

Many of the social restraints which in the past have helped to reinforce and to shore up the family are dissolving and disappearing. The time will come when only those who believe deeply and actively

in the family will be able to preserve their families in the midst of the gathering evil around us. ["Families Can Be Eternal," *Ensign*, November 1980, 4]

Two years later President Kimball described why this commitment to the kingdom in general and to the family specifically is of greater importance than merely preserving our own families. He said:

We must not falter nor weary in well-doing. We must lengthen our stride. Not only is our own eternal welfare at stake, but also the eternal welfare of many of our brothers and sisters who are not now members of this, the true Church. ["The Lord Expects Righteousness," *Ensign*, November 1982, 6]

Our Father has consistently demonstrated an ability to produce good results from difficult circumstances. When the people of Ammon saw their unconverted brethren preparing for war, this was their reaction:

Now there was not one soul among all the people who had been converted unto the Lord that would take up arms against their brethren; nay, they would not even make any preparations for war. . . .

. . . And all the people . . . assembled together, . . . took their swords, and all the weapons which were used for the shedding of man's blood, and they did bury them up deep in the earth. . . .

Now when the people saw that [the Lamanites] were coming against them they went out to meet them, and prostrated themselves before them to the earth, and began to call on the name of the Lord; and thus they were in this attitude when the Lamanites began to fall upon them, and began to slay them with the sword.

And thus without meeting any resistance, they did slay a thousand and five of them. [Alma 24:6, 17, 21–22]

Now let's pause for a minute. Would you pay good money to see a movie in which the good guys get mowed down and slaughtered? This event is not exactly what I would call a happy Hollywood ending. Now listen for the hand of the Lord in the commentary relative to this event:

Now when the Lamanites saw that their brethren would not flee from the sword, neither would they turn aside to the right hand or to the left, but that they would lie down and perish, and praised God even in the very act of perishing under the sword—

Now when the Lamanites saw this they did forbear from slaying them; and there were many whose hearts had swollen in them for those of their brethren who had fallen under the sword, for they repented of the things which they had done.

And it came to pass that they threw down their weapons of war, and they would not take them again, for they were stung for the murders which they had committed; and they came down even as their brethren, relying upon the mercies of those whose arms were lifted to slay them.

And it came to pass that the people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain; and those who had been slain were righteous people, therefore we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved. [Alma 24:23–26]

Pondering that event enables me to believe more fully in a prophecy of Nephi. He described a natural consequence of increasingly difficult times that similarly testifies of the hand of the Lord:

For the kingdom of the devil must shake, and they which belong to it must needs be stirred up unto repentance, or the devil will grasp them with his everlasting chains, and they be stirred up to anger, and perish. [2 Nephi 28:19]

Elder Neal A. Maxwell called this shaking of the devil's kingdom "redemptive turbulence." He said:

It is a very intriguing verse. . . . It will be such that a few people now caught up in [the] kingdom of the devil will be “stirred up” and find their way out and into the kingdom of God. . . . There will be in this redemptive turbulence some jarring inconsistencies brought to the fore—jarring enough that they will cause some people who are caught up in the [kingdoms of the world] to leave and find the truth. [“Sharing Insights from My Life,” BYU devotional address, 12 January 1999]

In other words, some people will tire of the natural consequences of living a worldly lifestyle—indeed, of living “without God in the world”—and seek for a better way of life. They will then ask, as we sing in Emma Lou Thayne’s touching hymn “Where Can I Turn for Peace?”:

*Where can I turn for peace?
Where is my solace
When other sources cease to make me whole?
When with a wounded heart, anger, or malice,
I draw myself apart,
Searching my soul?*

*Where, when my aching grows,
Where, when I languish,
Where, in my need to know, where can I run?
Where is the quiet hand to calm my anguish?
Who, who can understand?*

You and I know the answer to those questions: “He, only One” (*Hymns*, 2002, no. 129).

What is our role as redemptive turbulence literally shakes people out of the kingdoms of the world? We must stand with our arms open, ready to catch them, accepting the Lord’s invitation to “come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers [or catchers] of men” (Mark 1:17; see also Luke 5:10). We must be ready to answer as Jesus answered when those shaken by redemptive turbulence

wish to know if there is a better way to live—“Come and see” (John 1:39).

In probably the most often-quoted scriptural verses relating to example and light shining, I invite you to listen for four different candle-bearing conditions:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of this people. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

Behold, do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house;

Therefore let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven. [3 Nephi 12:14–16]

Our Lord explicitly, or implicitly, alludes to four different candle-bearing conditions in these verses. First, there are candles that are never lit. Second, there are lit candles that are lit but are deliberately hidden away under a bushel. You and I know what happens to lit candles placed under containers. Third, there are lit candles that are not hidden, but they aren’t really placed in a position in which their light is very visible either. Fourth—and this is the condition the Lord desires—there are candles placed in locations, like hills, that optimize their enlightening capabilities.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie encouraged us to “stand as lights and guides to the people” around us (“The Coming Tests and Trials and Glory,” *Ensign*, May 1980, 72). And may we remember that “we must be different in order to make a difference” in a darkening world (Neal A. Maxwell, *Deposition of a Disciple* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 55).

Thus, as insignificant as we feel our lights can be, they become brighter simply by contrast as the darkening occurs. Nowhere is that contrast more apparent than in our unwavering commitment to the family.

If you will set your light on a hill, President Spencer W. Kimball has promised, “I feel the

Lord has placed, in a very natural way within our circles of friends and acquaintances, many persons who are ready to enter into his Church" ("First Presidency Message: Are We Doing All We Can?" *Ensign*, February 1983, 4).

President Thomas S. Monson said two weeks ago:

Our opportunities to shine are limitless. They surround us each day, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. As we follow the example of the Savior, ours will be the opportunity to be a light, as it were, in the lives of those around us—whether they be our own family members, our coworkers, mere acquaintances or total strangers. ["Be a Light to the World," BYU devotional address, 1 November 2011]

Recently, a good friend in the McKay School of Education told me of his conversion. It began when he was an undergraduate in Rhode Island. When he asked a non-LDS faculty mentor where he might consider applying to graduate school, the mentor suggested, with no apparent explanation, that he attend a university somewhere in Utah. He applied to and was accepted at Utah State in Logan. Over time he noticed that he naturally gravitated toward certain USU faculty and later observed that every one of those faculty were Latter-day Saints. Their influence is why he is now a member, sealed in an eternal family unit.

In Sioux City, Iowa, I worked as a janitor before my mission. One evening a coworker who was more than twice my age approached me and said, "You are different." My kids would say that's no revelation, but I don't think that's what he meant. He said, "When I am around you I feel something." My young friends, when I am around you, I feel something too.

President James E. Faust described a similar experience:

*I recently recalled a historic meeting in Jerusalem about 17 years ago. It was regarding the lease for the land on which the Brigham Young University's Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies was later built. Before this lease could be signed, President Ezra Taft Benson and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, then president of Brigham Young University, agreed with the Israeli government on behalf of the Church and the university not to proselyte in Israel. You might wonder why we agreed not to proselyte. We were required to do so in order to get the building permit to build that magnificent building which stands in the historic city of Jerusalem. To our knowledge the Church and BYU have scrupulously and honorably kept that non-proselyting commitment. After the lease had been signed, one of our friends insightfully remarked, "Oh, we know that you are not going to proselyte, but what are you going to do about the light that is in their eyes?" He was referring to our students who were studying in Israel. ["The Light in Their Eyes," *Ensign*, November 2005, 20]*

Being ready to catch those shaken out of the world by redemptive turbulence means being ready to do the catching in some unusual places.

A few years ago we would regularly receive on our home phone a number of sales or solicitation calls. I remember answering three of those calls in one day. At the conclusion of the third call I placed the phone on the receiver rather energetically and remarked to my wife that if salespeople were going to interrupt me on a regular basis, I was going to teach them the gospel.

A few days later I answered a sales call and thought, "Okay, here we go." After politely declining the sales offer, I said, "I would like to ask you a question. Do you believe in Jesus Christ?"

The saleswoman replied, "Why, yes, I do."

I then asked, "Have you ever heard of the visit of Jesus Christ to America after His death and resurrection in Jerusalem?"

“No.”

“Well, 600 years before His birth, God directed a small group of people to leave Jerusalem and travel to the Western Hemisphere. These people were taught by prophets whose words were written on gold plates. Their words have been translated in our time in what we now know as the Book of Mormon, and this record describes the visit of Christ to them.”

She said, “That is the most wonderful thing I have ever heard.”

A few days later I got another call. I’m on a roll!

After the initial sales pitch, I replied, “I don’t really want what you are trying to sell me, but I would like to ask you a question. Do you believe in Jesus Christ?”

The salesman replied, “No, I’m a Muslim, and besides, I am not supposed to talk about personal things, so I better hang up.”

I said, “Before you do, let me say one thing. Do you have a family?”

“Yes.”

“Do you care about them?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Before you hang up, I want you to know that I may be the only person you will ever talk to who can tell you how you can have your family after you die.”

He replied, “What’s that?”

I said, “I thought you said you had to hang up.”

“Oh, no, I want to hear about this.”

Sometimes you get a little surprise in these kinds of situations. A saleslady gave me her spiel, and then I asked her if she believed in Christ and knew of His visit to America. She replied, “Yes, I read the Book of Mormon every day with my family. I’m an LDS mom in Las Vegas.”

Sometimes you can wonder if your offers to be a catcher are ever hitting home. Upon graduation Kim and I packed up our belongings and our new little baby—who is now thirty-

two years old—and headed for St. George, Utah, where I began my teaching career. We lived next door to Trish and her husband, Al. Trish wasn’t a member of the Church, and Al was a member but didn’t attend very often. We tried to do all the things a good neighbor does—plates of cookies, Christmas greetings, all that sort of thing—but we never received much reciprocation.

One day, out of the blue, I suggested to Kim that we purchase a gift subscription to the *Ensign* for Trish and Al. She is used to crazy suggestions from me, so she agreed.

A few months later, while riding my bike home from work, I noticed Trish was standing outside our home looking right at me with a sort of intense look.

I thought, “This is unusual.”

I stopped to greet her, and she asked, “Are you the one who sent us the *Ensign*?”

I thought, “Uh oh, I’m in trouble now,” and I meekly replied, “Uh . . . yeah.” How’s that for being bold?

She said, “I want to thank you for sending it to us, and I have one question for you. Would you mind coming to my home and teaching me about your church?”

I baptized Trish three weeks later.

Sometimes you start catching and then think folks don’t want you to catch them anymore. I was ordained a Seventy in St. George when dirt was new and Enoch was the president of the Church. In those days the office of a Seventy was a local office in the priesthood. Another Seventy and I were stake missionaries, and we helped our neighbor Matt and his wife come into the Church and to full Church activity. Then we were allowed to go to another stake and teach Matt’s parents, Ward and Louise. It was clear that Louise was quite interested, and it was also abundantly clear that Ward only listened—if you could call it listening—to be courteous to Louise. After several months, despite Louise’s progress, we had to stop teaching them.

A couple of years later, a colleague who was the ward mission leader in the ward Louise and Ward lived in came to my room and told me Louise wanted me to call her. Because I began my teaching career when dinosaurs roamed the earth, I didn't have a cell phone available to use, because they weren't invented yet. I had to wait until recess to call her on the office telephone. When I reached her, we exchanged greetings, and then she said, "I have decided to be baptized. I woke up this morning with this feeling that I wanted to be baptized."

I was elated. Then I asked, "Louise, how does Ward feel about this?"

She said, "I don't know. He hasn't said much."

I called her back that evening to follow up on the arrangements for her baptism, and, to my surprise, she told me Ward had decided to be baptized too. They were baptized a few days later and then were sealed in the holy temple a year after that. A few months later I received word that Louise had passed away.

Here's another story.

I recently heard Brother Russell T. Osguthorpe, the general Sunday School president and a member of the McKay School of Education faculty, talk about his brother-in-law, Steve. In his teenage years Steve decided to pursue a different lifestyle than that of the rest of his active LDS family. He later married a person who wasn't a Latter-day Saint and remained apart from the Church for fifty years.

About halfway through this fifty-year period Steve received a phone call from his newly assigned home teacher. He refused the invitation to accept home teaching visits but agreed to allow his home teacher to mail him a monthly postcard. This faithful home teacher mailed a postcard to Steve every month for twenty-two years. When Steve experienced redemptive turbulence in the death of his wife, who do you suppose Steve turned to for comfort and support? His faithful home

teacher who had not tired of holding his arms out ready to catch for twenty-two years. (See "What If Love Were Our Only Motive?" BYU devotional address, 8 March 2011.)

Sometimes you are just doing your thing, and the next thing you know you are in the catching business. Three years ago I was in San Diego attending a mathematics education conference. I rode a shuttle to the San Diego airport and noticed the driver might be a person who spoke Spanish. I deliberately sat in the front seat and used my limited Spanish vocabulary to say, "Cómo está?"

He replied, "Bien, gracias. Y usted?"

I said, "Bien."

He asked in Spanish, "Dónde aprendió a hablar español?"

I replied, "In inglés, por favor?"

"Where did you learn to speak Spanish?" he said.

I responded, "I am a Latter-day Saint, or Mormon, and I am in charge of ten of our congregations in Utah. One of them includes people who speak Spanish, so I have tried to learn a little. And besides, we have many Spanish-speaking people moving into our area, so I have learned a little Spanish so I can help them feel welcome."

He replied positively, and then I asked a question I had never asked before: "Do you know where your ancestors came from?"

"Over the Bering Sea, I guess."

I said, "Well, that's partially true, but the truth is, most of your ancestors came from Jerusalem."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

Then I told him the story of Lehi and the Book of Mormon and said, "Your ancestors prayed to God that their book would be preserved so that their children—and that would be you—could have it and use it to be as close to God as they were. Prophets of God wrote that book, and they are your ancestors. You are a descendant of prophets."

He said, “I did not know I was a descendant of prophets. How can I get hold of this book?”

You can guess the rest of the story.

In my next story I want you to notice how obviously the Lord was involved—and I testify that He is that involved in every catching story.

About a month ago my wife went to Iowa to visit our son and his family and our daughter-in-law. While she was gone, I did what every red-blooded American temporary bachelor does—I stopped on the way home from work to get some dinner to avoid starvation. I stopped at the Bajio in Riverwoods down in Provo and was waited on by a young man who was obviously of Latin-American descent. I greeted him in Spanish. He complimented me on my accent and asked me where I had learned Spanish.

I thought, “Here we go again,” and I told him about my Church calling.

Before I could continue, he said, “I’m a Mormon, but I am inactive. But today I went to Temple Square.”

I must have looked interested—because I was—so he continued: “The other night I had a strange dream in which I heard some words I did not really fully comprehend. I came to work the next day and told my coworker, who is LDS, about it, and he said the words I heard in my dream were the words you hear when you view the *Christus* statue in the Temple Square Visitors’ Center. He told me to go up there, so I did, and sure enough I heard those

words. I think the Lord was trying to tell me something. I am going to get active. I know who my bishop is, and I am going to ask him to help me repent of the bad decisions I have made.”

Brothers and sisters, I am a member of the Church today and a possessor of an eternal family because of a person who held his arms out to catch me—my brother.

In conclusion, I would ask, What might your generation be known for at this time in this dispensation? Perhaps your generation will be known as the generation that stood up in the face of great opposition to preserve their own families and, by so doing, shined such a light to the world that it became “a standard for the nations” (D&C 115:5).

My young friends, as I say to my children, the world is your oyster. There is so much riding on whether or not you will stand steadfast, firm, and immovable in the face of redemptive turbulence (see 1 Nephi 2:10; 3 Nephi 6:14). Don’t just focus on simply meeting the challenges of a darkening world in your own life. Seize the opportunities these conditions provide you. God sent you to earth at this time for a very real reason. You are the generation with the capacity to stand up and be counted in ways that will change the course of history. The light you shine in so doing, even the light of Jesus Christ, will literally be the means the Lord will use to save many in this generation and in generations to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.