

# Prepare for Life's Journey

BEN B. BANKS

It is a humbling experience for me to be here once again on the beautiful campus of Brigham Young University and to be with President and Sister Bateman, the administrators, faculty, and you wonderful members of the student body.

Most of you are still a little too young to appreciate how fast time passes. You know the older I get, the quicker it seems to pass. I am not sure if that's a sign of old age or just the pace of my lifestyle.

The story is told of two very elderly ladies who were enjoying the sunshine on a park bench in Miami. They had been meeting at the same park every sunny day for more than 12 years, chatting and enjoying each other's company.

One day, the younger of the two ladies turned to the other and said, "Please don't be angry with me, dear. It's so embarrassing after all these years. What is your name? I am trying to remember, but I just can't."

The older friend stared at her, looking very distressed, and said nothing for two full minutes. Finally, with tearful eyes, she said, "How soon do you have to know?"

Well, I haven't reached that stage yet, but I must confess that when I received this assignment I thought, "I've just had that opportunity."

But when I checked my journal, I found that two years had passed since I was last here speaking on this great campus.

Yes, how quickly time passes.

Ten years ago this October, while speaking in the priesthood meeting of general conference, I shared the following experience. One day

*my son Ben came to me and said, "Dad, we are going to hold our family reunion this summer at Flaming Gorge recreation area" (a distance of 220 miles east of Salt Lake City). "Why don't you, myself, and any of the boys in our family that would like to leave a few days early, ride our bikes to Flaming Gorge, and meet the rest of the family there?"*

*I said, "That sounds great, but we only have one motorcycle!"*

*Ben said, "No, Dad, you [don't understand.] I mean pedal bicycles." I thought he was kidding. He said, "I will outline and prepare a training schedule for us. We'll get up early Saturday mornings and for three hours we'll go out and ride over the*

---

*Ben B. Banks was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 11 May 1999.*

*courses I will outline, so that when the time comes we will be prepared to go.”*

*I said, “Okay,” not really knowing what I was in for. I didn’t own a bicycle and knew I would have to use my daughter’s old, heavy, ten-speed bicycle with what seemed like bent wheels and a seat that was terribly hard. I also knew that getting up early on Saturday mornings was not one of my favorite things. But knowing that some of my sons wanted me to go with them, I said, “Okay.”*

*As the time for training and preparation came, I found all kinds of excuses [not to] go on the training rides. However, one Saturday I rode with them to the top of Parleys Canyon and back. It was hard, but I thought I would be okay. Little did I know!*

*The time for the trip came. I joined my boys the second day of the trip, as I had meetings the first day. The journey that second day took us from Heber City to Roosevelt (approximately one hundred miles).*

*As we checked into the motel that evening, I called my wife at home and told her I had never hurt so bad in my life. Every muscle, bone, and fiber in my body hurt from my head to my feet. I implored her, “When you come tomorrow with the rest of the family, please bring all the ointment and lotion you can find.”*

*She said, “Honey, you sound terrible.”*

*I told her, “I look and feel worse than I sound.”*

*The next day I hated to see the dawn come, knowing what it would be like to sit on that hard seat and pedal all day once again [in order] to reach our destination—especially the stretch from Vernal to Flaming Gorge, which would include approximately thirty-six-plus miles with grades up to 9 percent and ninety-degree-plus temperatures. Needless to say, for me the whole trip was a very trying and arduous task. But for my sons, who spent a lot of time waiting at the top of the hills for their slow, unprepared dad, it was exciting, fun, and rewarding.*

*That evening as we arrived at our destination, I came to an easy, yet profound recognition of how poorly prepared I was for what should have been a great experience with my sons, but was not because*

*I did not take the time to properly prepare. I resolved that night that I would never again be that unprepared. I went home and bought bicycles for myself and my two youngest sons, and started training and preparing so that by the time the next summer came, my sons and I could ride our bikes to Lake Powell, a distance of three hundred miles, which we did. The next year we cycled to St. George, and every year thereafter, we rode our bikes to Lake Powell until our mission [assignment some years later]. [Ben B. Banks, “The Value of Preparation,” *Ensign*, November 1989, pp. 40–41]*

With the call to serve as a mission president 12 years ago and this subsequent call that took my wife and me to several international assignments, the long bike rides had to be put on hold for a period of time. I did, however, take my bicycle with me wherever my assignments were in hopes that I would be able to find time to ride occasionally. I wanted to be prepared so if the opportunity for a long ride ever came again I would be able to do it. That opportunity came once again this past fall when I was given permission to take a few days away from the office. At the invitation of that same son who years ago suggested we ride to Flaming Gorge, and now joined by another son and our only daughter, we flew with our bikes to Bozeman, Montana, where we then proceeded to ride to Jackson Hole, Wyoming. At my age, preparation continues to be very, very important in order to survive such a ride.

The prophet Amulek testified, “This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors” (Alma 34:32).

If it is important to prepare for a bike ride, it is much more important for you to prepare for your future—both for this life and for the eternities.

As I contemplate the significance of what you are doing in this great institution of learning, I think of the words of President Thomas S. Monson:

*Preparation for life's opportunities and responsibilities has never been more vital. We live in a changing society. Intense competition is a part of life. The role of husband, father, grandfather, provider, and protector is vastly different from what it was a generation ago. Preparation is not a matter of perhaps or maybe. It is a mandate. The old phrase "Ignorance is bliss" is forever gone. Preparation precedes performance.* [Thomas S. Monson, "Duty Calls," *Ensign*, May 1996, p. 43; emphasis in original]

Did you catch the phrase "It is a mandate"? The dictionary defines the word *mandate* as "an official or authoritative instruction or command" (*Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 1991 edition, p. 608). Let me repeat that: "an official or authoritative instruction or command." An interesting choice of words then, from a prophet, seer, and revelator.

As we consider our preparation for life, remember the Lord counsels us as we read in Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." And then in the Doctrine and Covenants we are told, "Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118). But remember, the more knowledge and learning we obtain and the more success we gain, the more humility we need.

Recognizing that "the glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth" and that "light and truth forsake that evil one" (D&C 93:36–37), we can immediately see that there are many benefits. One such benefit is that of having light and truth in our lives.

You young people face an exciting and yet daunting future of ever-changing career opportunities as job markets come and go within the pressures of a global economy. Whereas once a career decision meant a job for life in a given vocation, nowadays you may have to make up to three or four major career changes during your working life.

How do you begin to prepare for making such monumental decisions? How can we recognize that we are making the right career move? Suddenly the need for spiritual light in making our decisions becomes very real.

Do you see the value of having the Spirit help as you plot your course through this life's challenges and decisions?

The Latter-day Saint hymn "The Iron Rod" (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 274) illustrates beautifully the vision of Lehi as found in 1 Nephi 8. Its message for us is to hold to the rod, the iron rod—or, as we know, the word of God—and it will safely guide us on life's journey. You will recall that in the vision Lehi saw many people in a great and spacious building mocking and pointing their fingers at those who had arrived to partake of the fruit. Some recipients of this mocking even fell away and became lost.

Many in the world today would have you believe that God's word plays no part in your educational process. They scoff at your religious standards and beliefs. Some would even have you believe that you cannot reconcile your faith with your educational knowledge—that they are somehow incompatible and inappropriate and that "no right thinking man or women could believe that sort of thing anymore."

We know that this is foolishness. The history of this world is replete with stories of man's disregard for his Creator, which disregard leads to man's subsequent demise.

By obtaining *now* both spiritual and educational preparation, you are acquiring for yourself and your family, or future family, the knowledge you will need to provide both spiritual and temporal pillars during mortal probation here on earth.

In general conference of October 1995, Elder Richard G. Scott said, "The Lord's plan is to exalt you to live with Him and be greatly blessed. The rate at which you qualify is generally set by your capacity to mature, to grow, to love, and to give of yourself" (Richard G. Scott,

“Trust in the Lord,” *Ensign*, November 1995, p. 18).

The prophet Alma taught his son Helaman a great principle. He said, “O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God” (Alma 37:35).

By keeping the commandments of God you will have greater understanding and enjoy many blessings, which include:

1. Gaining the necessary secular knowledge needed to win employment that will provide for the temporal needs of your family.

2. Enjoying a greater understanding of your potential.

3. Having the companionship of the Holy Ghost to influence your decisions.

4. Obtaining a promise of protection from the influences of the evil one.

5. And, of course, gaining the wisdom and knowledge needed to prepare you for the eternities.

In 1971 Elder Dallin H. Oaks said that at Brigham Young University

*we are concerned with teaching the fundamentals of spiritual and secular knowledge and with bringing those teachings into harmony in the lives of men and women in order to prepare them for a balanced and full life of service to God and fellowman.*

[Dallin H. Oaks, *CR*, October 1971, p. 124]

He added some thoughts and goals that we need to pay special attention to in our preparation:

1. *Rigorous standards and high achievement in any field of learning are not at odds with faith and devotion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Strive for excellence, use the talents that the Lord has given you, meet and master the learning of men.*

2. *In approaching any field of learning, remember the Lord’s direction to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith.” (D&C 88:118.) . . .*

3. *Cherish and nourish your spiritual life. Seek spiritual growth at the same time that you are seeking to enlarge your learning in other areas. Nourish your spirit just as regularly as you nourish your body or mind. Don’t neglect study of the gospel and activity in the Church during the period of your schooling.* [Oaks, *CR*, October 1971, p. 124]

Sometimes we can be so caught up with worldly distractions, a current situation, or a difficulty that we fail to realize that answers to many of life’s problems are already within our reach.

President David O. McKay referred to William George Jordan, who

*tells the story of some men in a ship, which, during a terrific storm, was driven far out of its course, and, helpless and disabled, was carried into a strange bay. The water supply gave out and the crew suffered the agony of thirst yet dared not drink of the salt water in which that vessel floated. In the last extremity they lowered a bucket over the ship’s side, and in desperation quaffed the beverage they thought was sea water, but to their joy and amazement the water was fresh, cool and life-giving! They were in a fresh-water arm of the sea and they did not know it! They had simply to reach down and accept the new life and strength for which they craved.*

President McKay then added:

*The illustration is applicable to a large part of mankind today. Men and nations are drifting. They have lost their bearings; their wisdom is baffled. Tried and true methods of the past have been discarded, and vague and indefinite theories offered as panaceas for social and economic ills. There is an inescapable necessity for a safe and experienced pilot at the wheel.* [David O. McKay, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay, *Pathways to Happiness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1957), pp. 138–39]

As Latter-day Saints we should realize that just gaining a college education is not enough to guarantee our success in a changing world. Our preparation for the future must be founded upon principles of the gospel and not on those of the world.

Never in the history of this earth has a group of students had to face the turmoil and wickedness that is so pervasive today. The Apostle Paul, when he was incarcerated in the dungeons in Rome, prior to being martyred as a Christian and follower of Christ, wrote a letter to his good friend and protégé Timothy, wherein he described the last days, or the permissive society in which we live today:

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.*

*For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*

*Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,*

*Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. [2 Timothy 3:1–4]*

As you continue your education, it is very important that you do not become one of those who Paul described as “ever learning, [but] never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7).

Isn’t that a most accurate description of life on earth for many people today?

President Dwight D. Eisenhower had interesting insight into the importance of spiritual and moral strength.

*One evening [he] had a few close friends at the White House in Washington, D.C. They were discussing world problems. For a long while, the President listened; then he said:*

*“My friends, the biggest, most powerful weapon in the world is not the atomic bomb, or even the fighting ability of men. It is their moral and*

*spiritual strength. Nothing can ever conquer that strength. Remember this, gentlemen, because that is the weapon our enemies really fear.” [John Longden, CR, April 1968, p. 138]*

We must never lose sight of the fact that this life is a probationary period and that by combining our knowledge, both spiritual and secular, with holding to the rod, we can be the recipients of many great and wonderful blessings.

The Apostle Paul taught the Corinthians that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

How do we show the Lord that we love him? He taught us this: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Just as we need to prepare for our life, so also do we need to live our lives in such a way that we will be prepared for the next life.

As Elder Sterling W. Sill said in general conference in October 1965:

*We can imagine some wonderful things, but we cannot even conceive of that magnificent experience that lies beyond the borders of this life. Certainly the greatest wonders of the future will not be in the improvement of our television, [our computers,] or our airplanes; they will be primarily in ourselves. The greater the understanding of our own future, the more effectively we will be able to prepare for it. [Sterling W. Sill, CR, October 1965, p. 57]*

The prophet Brigham Young said:

*Prepare to die, is not the exhortation in this church and kingdom; but prepare to live is the word with us, and improve all we can [for the life] hereafter, wherein we may enjoy a more exalted condition of intelligence, wisdom, light, knowledge, power, glory, and exaltation. [JD 11:132]*

When asked the question “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” the Savior responded by saying, “Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:25, 27). We show our Heavenly Father and our neighbors how much we love them by the way we serve them.

The prophet Alma explained that baptism requires that we

*bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times.* [Mosiah 18:8–9]

If we learn and remember that “charity is the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47), we will be able to bless the lives of all those with whom we associate, for

*charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* [Moroni 7:45]

As we prepare for our future, we need to make sure that our secular interests don’t distract us from or take priority over the spiritual ones. The Lord has taught us:

*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:*

*But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:*

*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* [Matthew 6:19–21]

So many people have their hearts set upon the things of this world. It is as if wealth and

material possessions have become gods whom they worship. Man’s never-ending quest for ever more possessions and affluence has, in many cases, squeezed out feelings of kindness and benevolence toward the poor and needy.

In general conference in October 1967, Elder Delbert L. Stapley quoted President Heber J. Grant, who offered this counsel:

*“He whose every act has fitted him for the enjoyment of eternity will be far in advance of the man whose all has been centered on the things of this life.”* (Millennial Star, Vol. 66, March 31, 1904, p. 201.) [Quoted in Stapley, CR, October 1967, p. 71]

Latter-day Saints preparing for a successful future need to remember that selfishness must always be recognized and immediately replaced by selflessness.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks tells

*the apocryphal story of two men standing before the casket of a wealthy friend. Asked one, “How much property did he leave?” Replied the other, “He left all of it.”* [“Tithing,” Ensign, May 1994, p. 35]

Now, in closing, I want to share with you the story of a man who lost his sense of priorities at an early age.

President Hugh B. Brown, as a young soldier in World War I, was visiting an elderly friend in the hospital. This friend was a millionaire several times over who, at the age of 80, was lying at death’s door. President Brown related:

*As I stood by his bedside and thought over various parts of his life . . . , as I thought of his divorced wife, of his five children, all of whom were estranged, and none of whom cared enough to come to the hospital to see him, as I thought of the things he had lost which money could not buy and noted his tragic situation and the depth of his misery, I asked him what he would do if he had the privilege of living his life over again and could start it with*

*the wisdom which had come through the years, what he considered the real values in life as he stood near the end of it. . . .*

*This old gentleman, who died a few days later, said to me, "As I think back over life, the most important and valuable asset which I might have had but which I lost in the process of accumulating millions, was the simple faith my mother had in God and in the immortality of the soul."*

*The old gentleman asked me to get a little book out of his briefcase and gave me the page on which he had marked a poem, and then he said, "You asked me what is the most valuable thing in life. I cannot answer you in better words than those used by the poet. Will you read them to me?" And as I read the following lines I thought it was he, not the poet, that was speaking, and I read:*

*"I'm an Alien"*

*"I'm an alien, to the faith my mother taught me. I'm a stranger to the God that heard my mother when she cried.*

*I'm an alien to the comfort that, 'Now I lay me,' brought me.*

*To the everlasting arms that held my father when he died.*

*When the great world came and called me, I deserted all to follow.*

*Never noting in my blindness I had slipped my hand from His,*

*Never dreaming in my dazedness that the bubble fame is hollow.*

*That the wealth of gold is tinsel, as I since have learned it is.*

*I have spent a lifetime seeking things I spurned when I found them,*

*I have fought and been rewarded in many a winning cause,*

*But I'd give it all, fame and fortune and the pleasures that surround them,*

*If I only had the faith that made my mother what she was."*

*That was the dying testimony of a man who was born in the Church but had drifted far from it. That*

*was the brokenhearted cry of a lonely man who could have anything that money could buy, but who had lost the most important things of life in order to accumulate this world's goods. [Hugh B. Brown, *Continuing the Quest* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1961), pp. 33–34]*

May we not follow this example.

We are led by a prophet of God who gives us the direction we need in order to focus our preparation. We understand that as we strive for excellence in our secular lives we can balance our efforts with our own spiritual quest to be more like the Master, even Jesus Christ.

President Thomas S. Monson taught:

*Before we can successfully undertake a personal search for Jesus, we must first prepare time for him in our lives and room for him in our hearts. In these busy days there are many who have time for golf, time for shopping, time for work, time for play, but no time for Christ.*

*Lovely homes dot the land and provide rooms for eating, rooms for sleeping, playrooms, sewing rooms, television rooms, but no room for Christ. [Thomas S. Monson, CR, October 1965, p. 143; emphasis in original]*

Remember to

*cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.*

*Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God. [Alma 37:36–37]*

As we meet today in this marvelous center of learning and study, let us realize the necessity of harnessing our secular preparation to a

firm spiritual base. Let us now press forward with listening ears ready to show charity and kindness to those we meet.

As many of our Church leaders like to caution, avoid being in “the thick of thin things” (Edith Wharton; see Marion D. Hanks, *Freedom and Responsibility*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, BYU baccalaureate address, 28 May 1964, p. 9). We should make sure we achieve the very best in our academic life but recognize that our spiritual preparation will contribute to those achievements and give us peace throughout life and the eternities.

And as we do these things, we “shall be lifted up at the last day” (Alma 37:37).

In conclusion, as I look at you outstanding young men and women here at Brigham Young University today, the future seems very positive and bright for young people who love the Lord. You radiate a wonderful spirit, which I feel from you. Yes, I believe that Latter-day Saints everywhere can reap the blessings of being well prepared.

I bear my witness and testimony to each of you who are here in this assembly today that the church to which you and I belong is the true and living church upon the face of the earth—even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

My wife and I recently had the occasion to spend a couple of hours alone walking hand in hand through the Sacred Grove. I testify to you the Prophet Joseph saw what he said he saw as the Father and the Son appeared to him in that sacred ground of the holy Sacred Grove. As the Father addressed his Son, our Savior Jesus

Christ, with those seven words—“This is my Beloved Son, hear Him”—the gospel was reintroduced to the earth through the Prophet Joseph, never to be taken from the earth again in its fullness. I testify that the Prophet Joseph was the prophet of this dispensation and that today you and I have the opportunity of sitting and listening to a living prophet—even President Gordon B. Hinckley, who holds all the keys of the kingdom. I promise that if we will listen to his counsel, he will help us to prepare one day to be worthy to return to the presence of the Father and the Son.

I testify that God lives and Jesus is the Christ. I try to comprehend the great love that our Father in Heaven must have had for us that he allowed his Only Begotten Son in the flesh and the Firstborn of the Spirit to come to this earth and be offered as a sacrifice for you and for me and for all mankind. I try to comprehend the great love that our Lord and Savior—even Jesus Christ—has for us that he was willing to take upon himself the sins of all mankind and suffer the persecutions, the torment, and the ridicule that no mere mortal man could endure. Because of his great love for us as our Savior and Redeemer, he fulfilled the Atonement and the Resurrection that make it possible for all of us to live again.

May we so prepare our lives, my young friends, that one day we will have that glorious opportunity of sitting in the presence of the Father and his Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, of which I testify and pray his blessings upon you in his holy name, even Jesus Christ. Amen.