

“Evolution of the Mind, the Heart, and the Soul”

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Brothers and sisters, friends: welcome to the Brigham Young University 1999 fall semester. It is good to be here today. It is awe inspiring to look out over this vast congregation. We are all in the right place at the right time. How very blessed we are to be at this great university to increase our knowledge of truth, both secular and spiritual. The quest for learning is a ceaseless quest for truth.

Ultimately, any person who seeks after truth will be led to the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it contains all truth. Gospel principles bless all who seek to understand God’s ways and His plan for the everlasting salvation of His children. The gospel teaches people who they are and of the potential that life promises not only on this earth but in the eternities. The teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ provide a clear understanding of mankind’s relationship to God. Seekers after truth learn that they are His spirit children, that He is a loving and kind Father in Heaven, and that each person’s destiny is to return to a heavenly home if they will be true and faithful.

Eternal Progress

In a survey of Americans performed for the Lutheran Brotherhood by Yankelovich Partners, most adults were concerned with and

wanted answers to eternal questions. Those participating in the survey were asked the following question: “What [would you] ask a god or supreme being if [you] could get a direct and immediate answer?” The most frequently asked question was: “What’s my purpose here?” Thirty-four percent, or more than one of every three persons, wanted to know the purpose of life. The second most popular question was: “Will I have life after death?” Almost one out of five persons asked this question. Another 16 percent asked the question: “Why do bad things happen?” and another 7 percent wondered if there is intelligent life elsewhere. Seventy-six percent of the individuals surveyed asked questions pertaining to one’s ultimate purpose and destiny. (See “Going to a Higher Authority,” USA Snapshots, *USA Today* [28 May 1999]: 1A.) There is a thirst for spiritual knowledge. The answers to these questions are contained in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The plan of salvation as contained in the restored gospel provides clear and definitive answers to these queries.

The plan of salvation teaches that mortality is but one stage of life and that life existed

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before one's birth and stretches into the eternities after death. Life's purpose is to "be added upon" (Abraham 3:26), to be tested, and to participate in a growth process that has eternal consequences. The knowledge gained and the decisions made in this life are critical and determine one's ultimate destiny. Mortality is a time to acquire spiritual knowledge, to be tested with respect to one's use of agency, to experience the bitter and the sweet, to learn from one's mistakes, and to succeed with the Lord's help.

All of God's children are endowed with a special light or conscience that allows them to differentiate between truth and error (see John 1:9, Moroni 7:15–16) and to learn from experience. The more obedient one is to light, the more truth one receives (see D&C 50:23–24). It follows that the more consistent one's life is in living truth, the greater one's capacity and strength. Some individuals live in a time or place where access to truth is limited. Since earth life is but one phase in eternity, they are given opportunities later consistent with their willingness to live whatever truths they enjoyed on earth (see D&C 137:5–10). There is life after death. There is intelligent life elsewhere (see Moses 1:33). There is purpose to life.

One of the most glorious truths contained in the Lord's plan is that of eternal progress—the opportunity to progress from mortality to immortality, to overcome death and receive a glorified resurrected body, to overcome weakness and progress until one receives a glory and station like that of our eternal parents (see 1 Corinthians 15:42–44, D&C 76:94–95). President Gordon B. Hinckley has commented on this subject as follows:

The whole design of the gospel is to lead us onward and upward to greater achievement, even, eventually, to godhood. This great possibility was enunciated by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the King Follett sermon (see Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 342–62) and emphasized by President

Lorenzo Snow. It is this grand and incomparable concept: As God now is, man may become! (See The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, comp. Clyde J. Williams, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984, p. 1.) ["Don't Drop the Ball," Ensign, November 1994, 48; emphasis in original]

What is eternal progress? For those in mortality and in the spirit world, it is an increase in spiritual knowledge, moral strength, and intelligence based on righteous living. It is the internalizing of true principles in the way one thinks and lives. It is repenting of one's sins and feeling the forgiveness that comes from the Atonement through the Holy Spirit. The scriptures indicate that intelligence is more than intellectual capacity. It is a righteous disposition that leads one to forsake evil (see D&C 93:36–37). The acquiring of spiritual knowledge and intelligence comes through diligence in obeying eternal laws. For one to receive the strength required to progress eternally, one must have a testimony that certain principles are true—i.e., a confirmation through the Holy Spirit that one is on the right path. This requires the companionship of the Holy Ghost. He serves as a teacher, a cleanser, a witness, a sanctifier, and a sealer. He links individuals into the power and grace of the Savior's atonement.

The growth process is characterized by small steps as indicated by the Lord's words to Nephi:

For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. [2 Nephi 28:30]

The process of spiritual growth described in the above scripture is like the process of a child learning to play the piano. The child begins with simple melodies that are mastered with hours of practice. The practice and lessons learned then provide the foundation for mastering more complex compositions. Eventually, with discipline and rigor and many additional practice hours over a significant period of time, an accomplished pianist is produced. Most growth processes in life are a type and shadow of the way in which God intends for us to grow, line upon line and precept upon precept, until we become finished products. President Hinckley has commented on the growth process in these words:

None of us . . . knows enough. The learning process is an endless process. We must read, we must observe, we must assimilate, and we must ponder that to which we expose our minds. I believe in evolution, not organic evolution, as it is called, but in the evolution of the mind, the heart, and the soul of man. I believe in improvement. I believe in growth. [TGBH, 298]

Several years ago, while my husband and I were living in Japan, we had the opportunity to visit the town of Wajima on the west coast. Wajima is the home of Japan's famous lacquerware. The Wajima factory has a display of the manufacturing process that illustrates the many steps required to create a beautiful piece of lacquerware. There are 19 steps involved before the final design is added. Of particular interest is the number of times an item is polished following the additions of lacquer and lacquer paste. As I studied the various steps, I thought how like life the lacquerware manufacturing process is. As human beings, we are continually being added upon—growing from one lesson to another, from grace to grace.

Polishing is part of life. Polishing removes the rough edges. Often, polishing is represented by the hard times, the difficult times,

the sad times. God does not inflict evil upon us or pave our way with stones. The bad things, referred to in the Yankelovich survey, are often man-made or environmental in origin. Even so, they are part of the design of life. Their purpose is to burnish our souls and help us understand our dependence on God. When we are exhausted from the trials of the day, the Lord through His Spirit refreshes our spirit and prepares us for a new day. Our purpose is not to escape problems but to overcome them with the Lord's help. God through His prophets said, "I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (Isaiah 48:10). He also said that all "things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7). The heat of the day may not only exhaust us but also purge the impurities within.

In Matthew 5:48 the Lord admonishes all of us: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." It is possible in the eternities to know all things and have the capacity to endure all things and live according to all truth. However, the goal will not be reached in this lifetime, nor can it be accomplished on one's own. As imperfect beings subject to the world's temptations, we need the help of an all-wise Father and His Son. We can only be perfected through the Father's plan, with the core of that plan centered in Christ and His atonement (see Moroni 10:32–33).

During the time we lived in Japan, we were provided a furnished apartment. Consequently, there were only a few items that we took with us from our home in the United States. Family pictures, books, favorite recipes, and a beautiful crystal egg were among the items we chose. At one point in time, the crystal egg belonged to our daughter Michele. It had been part of her egg collection. When Michele married, she took the eggs to her new home with the exception of the one made of crystal. She said to me, "You keep it, Mom.

I know how much you admire it.” The crystal egg was special to me. First, it reminded me of Michele, her generosity, and her purity and desire to serve others. It reminded me of the many other eggs in Michele’s collection. As the egg collection grew over a number of years, I often thought how like people they are—some large, some small, some plain, others decorative and colorful. Some of the eggs were humorous and others dignified. Looking at the eggs was like looking at humanity—each special in its uniqueness.

The crystal egg also reminds me of perfection. It has many facets. When the egg is held up to the light, the crystal facets seem to attract, cleave to, and then reflect the light rays. It sets a standard for me. I would like to attract

the light of truth into my life and then reflect light to others. I desire to be a servant of Jesus Christ and reflect His light. If the world were filled with light, it would be perfect—perfect in Christ. We would have experienced the step-by-step process of having been born of God. We would have the image of Christ in our countenance (see Alma 5:14).

The purpose of learning is eternal in nature. Some truths are more important than others. President Spencer W. Kimball stated plainly: “The secular without the foundation of the spiritual is but like the foam upon the milk, the fleeting shadow” (*TSWK*, 390). Sacred truths are the key to one’s eternal progress. We *have* been given much—and we, too, must give. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.