

“Neither Trust in the Arm of Flesh”

RUSSELL M. NELSON

Thank you, President Samuelson. Thank you for your excellent service and exemplary leadership. We admire you and Sister Samuelson greatly. We also express our gratitude to the faculty and staff for their help to these choice students at Brigham Young University. Wendy and I are grateful to be here with you today.

We are very pleased that President Dieter F. Uchtdorf has been awarded an honorary doctorate. We congratulate him. When we think of all he has accomplished—from his childhood days as a refugee in Europe’s cold, cruel cauldron of war to his position now in the First Presidency of the Church—we stand in awe. Through those years he has become a great man of faith and a devoted disciple of the Lord. Wendy and I have deep affection for him, for his dear wife, Harriet, and for their family.

Now to each individual graduate we extend our heartfelt congratulations. We commend you for completing the course. You are winners. To your families and loved ones who have encouraged you, prayed for you, and sacrificed for you, we also express our gratitude and love.

Some of you graduates will continue your educational studies. Keep up the good work! We’re proud of you! Most of you will not pur-

sue more formal education but will embark on your chosen career. We’re grateful for you and wish you well.

Brothers and sisters, regardless of your choices for the future, you will continue to learn. As long as you live, you will learn. It is part of God’s plan for us. You will grow intellectually and spiritually. Just as Jesus the Christ “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man,”¹ so may you.

To increase your wisdom and stature, you will exercise your agency. You will choose your teachers and your role models. Choose them wisely. Heed this counsel of Alma: “Trust no one to be your teacher . . . , except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments.”²

If you enter the job market now, you will do so at a time of economic distress. Job opportunities throughout the world are diminishing and becoming more competitive. You will need to work hard and perform well to hold a job in the difficult days that lie ahead.

Russell M. Nelson was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this commencement address was given on 23 April 2009.

Challenges are not limited to your age group. The decline of our economy is affecting many others. Senior citizens who have retired from their work are strained because the value of their nest egg has now been substantially eroded.

Such economic woes are not new. Verses recorded long ago in the Book of Mormon apply today. From the book of Helaman we read:

The time cometh that . . . your riches . . . become slippery, that ye cannot hold them; and in the days of your poverty ye cannot retain them. . . .

. . . Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery that we should lose them; for behold, our riches are gone from us.³

Throughout history economic conditions have been cyclic in nature. So you will live to see more ups and downs in the economy, just as surely as you will see the seasons change.

With the cycles of man and nature all about us, we need to remember that truth never changes. God lives. He is our Father. He loves us. He wants us to be happy. Because He loves us, He wants us to prepare well now for our eventual return to Him. Can you imagine anything more joyful than that homecoming? It truly will be glorious for those who have qualified for the blessings of eternal life.⁴

To assist us in that quest, we have been given help through the teachings of God's prophets and the scriptures. Here is one example: "Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm."⁵ To rephrase that in today's terms, if you trust only in your 401(k)s or IRAs, your retirement plans may be disappointing. But your investments in tithing will continue to pay rich dividends—here and hereafter. Indeed, the nest egg of tithing will never be eroded.

We learn more about the limitations of the arm of flesh from the Doctrine and Covenants. In its preface we read that "the weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh."⁶ Or, to rephrase that warning, even though you may be learned in the ways of the world, don't forget the power of God.

More than 30 years ago my medical school classmates and I learned that lesson in an unforgettable way. We will never forget it. Our experience took place in the little town of Manzanillo on Mexico's western coast. The year was 1978. We were attending a meeting with our medical school graduating class and their wives.

One evening after the scientific sessions had been completed, one of the doctors suddenly became seriously ill. Without warning, he began to lose massive amounts of blood from his stomach. Totally stunned, we surrounded him, watching life's precious blood flow out from him. There we were, medical specialists skilled in various disciplines—including surgeons, anesthesiologists, and internists—with wisdom gained through more than 30 years of experience. What could we do? The nearest hospital was in Guadalajara, more than 100 mountainous miles away. It was night. No planes could fly. Blood transfusions were out of the question because of lack of equipment. All of our combined knowledge could not be mobilized to stop his hemorrhage. We were totally without the facilities or equipment needed to save the life of our beloved friend.

Our stricken colleague, a faithful Latter-day Saint, was well aware of his plight. Ashen and pale, he whispered a request for the administration of a priesthood blessing. Several of us held the Melchizedek Priesthood. We responded to his request immediately. I was asked to seal the anointing. The Spirit dictated

that he be blessed to the end that the bleeding would stop and that he would continue to live and return to his home. That blessing was administered in the name of the Lord.

The next morning, his condition had improved. Miraculously, the bleeding had stopped. His blood pressure had returned to normal. In a couple of days he was able to return to his home. Unitedly, we thanked the Lord for this most remarkable blessing.

The lesson we learned was simple: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”⁷ We experienced this firsthand. This doctrine, taught repeatedly in the scriptures,⁸ had now become our sure and certain knowledge.

Please do not misunderstand me, brothers and sisters. Of course we need to prepare for worthy work to do. Yes, we do need to do our work well, whatever we choose to do in life. We need to be able to render significant service. And before we can achieve that competence, we must have an education. With us, education is a religious responsibility. “The glory of God [really] is intelligence.”⁹

But the learning of man has its limitations. And sometimes, as in our circumstance in rural Mexico, the combined learning of many experts cannot be applied when we need it most. We have to place our trust in the Lord.

That experience in Mexico taught us another important lesson. It pertains to our ultimate priorities and highest destinies as mortal beings. We learned that a doctor’s ultimate destination is not in the hospital. For a lawyer, it is not in the courtroom. For a jet pilot, it is not in the cockpit of a Boeing 747. Each person’s chosen occupation is only a *means* to an end; it is not an end in itself.

The end for which each of you should strive is to be the person that you can become—the person that God wants you to be. The day will come when your professional career will end, as it has already for President Uchtdorf and Elder Nelson. The career that you will have

labored so hard to achieve—the work that will have supported you and your family—will one day be behind you.

Then you will have learned this great lesson: Much more important than what you have done for a living is what kind of a person you have become. On your final graduation day—when you leave this frail existence—what you have become will matter most. Attributes such as “faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, [and] diligence”¹⁰ will all be weighed in the Lord’s balance.

Keep learning and keep preparing for your ultimate graduation day.¹¹ From time to time ask yourself these questions:

- Am I ready to meet my Maker?
- Am I worthy of all the blessings He has in store for His faithful children?
- Have I received my endowment and sealing ordinances of the temple?
- Have I remained faithful to my covenants?
- Have I qualified for the greatest of all God’s blessings—the blessing of eternal life?¹²

Long ago, Moses and the children of Israel sang this song together: “The Lord is my strength . . . and he is . . . my salvation: he is my God.”¹³ I hope that graduates from Brigham Young University can sing that song with equal conviction.

Those who cherish their faith in God—those who trust in Him—have been given this great scriptural promise:

Let no man glory in man, but rather let him glory in God. . . .

*These shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever.*¹⁴

That this may be the ultimate destiny for each of us is my humble prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Luke 2:52.
2. Mosiah 23:14.
3. Helaman 13:31, 33.
4. It will also be dear to our heavenly parents. The Psalmist wrote, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).
5. 2 Nephi 28:31.
6. D&C 1:19.
7. Proverbs 3:5.
8. See, for example, Proverbs 11:28; Jeremiah 17:5; Romans 8:1; 2 Nephi 4:34–35; 2 Nephi 28:31; D&C 1:19–23.
9. D&C 93:36.
10. D&C 4:6.
11. See Alma 34:33.
12. See D&C 14:7.
13. Exodus 15:2; see also Joseph Smith Translation, Exodus 15:2.
14. D&C 76:61–62.