

Tomorrow Is Today

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My dear brothers, sisters, and friends, I am grateful to be with you this afternoon. May I begin by expressing my deep feelings of respect and admiration to all who are graduating today. We are profoundly grateful for your righteous and exemplary lives. For the past several years you have devoted long days and seemingly endless nights studying and preparing, both academically and spiritually, to enter a world that, quite frankly, needs you desperately. By your work and your faith you have qualified yourselves to be recognized by this unique university and by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which sponsors and supports this university.

We enthusiastically salute you for all you have achieved and, more important, for who you are and for who you will become. We thankfully recognize the unwavering support of your parents and loved ones, dedicated faculty members and staff, and friends and others who have contributed to your success. Congratulations to you and to all who have helped you!

Now may I say that it is truly an honor and a privilege to be assigned by the First

Presidency to participate in these commencement exercises. I convey to you their love, admiration, and gratitude for a job well done.

Without speaking too much of my own experience and life, please allow me to share a few principles and examples that may help you as you look forward to life's journey ahead. In doing so, I recognize that the majority of those present are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I also recognize those who come from other backgrounds and pray that my words and counsel will be meaningful to all.

Like you, Sister Christensen and I have been greatly influenced and blessed by our association with Brigham Young University. Three of our four children have received undergraduate degrees here, and we look forward to our youngest son's graduation in a few more semesters. Sister Christensen and I met at BYU

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some thirty-four years ago—something that likely would not have happened anywhere else. As I remember, we met as I was running off of the practice field in front of the Smith Fieldhouse, and she had just finished her daily run on the indoor track. Due primarily to the example and influence of family members, ward members, and a few roommates, I set aside my athletic pursuits to serve a full-time mission to Chile. Like many of you, my mission experience changed my life forever. Sister Christensen survived the dating frenzies while I was away, and we were married three months after I returned home. We lived at Wymount Terrace and had our first child a year before I finished my undergraduate studies. After working for a season to get out of debt, we attended graduate school to further our studies and personal preparation.

Thirty-one years ago this week, I was in this very building, sitting where you are, thinking many of the things you most likely are thinking and listening to those assigned to speak at our graduation ceremony. I suspect that in thirty years or so, someone from your class will be standing where I now stand, speaking to the graduates of that day. More importantly, many of you will become the next generation of leaders in your chosen professions and in the Church. As Elder M. Russell Ballard taught in a recent CES fireside, thirty years from now we will depend largely on you to direct the affairs of an ever-growing, worldwide Church.¹ In a few years my generation will gracefully exit the stage and invite you and your generation to take the lead in business, education, science, medicine, government, and the Church. I must confess that while I was sitting where you now sit, it never dawned on me that this transition would actually happen, or that it would happen so quickly.

As I have observed, there are many—perhaps more so among those of your generation—who prefer to focus on the present rather than think too seriously about the future. If

you will pardon the reference, there are many who tend to embrace the infamous words of the Grand Master Oogway from the movie *Kung Fu Panda* (2008). In responding to Po Ping's concerns about what would happen in the future, Master Oogway taught the following: "You are too concerned about what was and what will be." He said, "There is a saying: yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That is why it is called the 'present.'"

I hate to contradict a pop-culture icon such as *Kung Fu Panda*; however, please allow me to take some of the mystery out of Master Oogway's philosophy of the future. In doing so, I will start by sharing a brief history of a close friend. I know of a family who lived close to a large amusement park. Like others in the area, this family would drive by the park often. Each time their young son would ask, "Daddy, can we go there? I really want to go there and play on all the rides." Understanding that his son would continue to ask the same question week after week, the father would reply, "Maybe tomorrow we can go." This little interchange repeated itself again and again until finally, early one Saturday morning, the boy came running into his parents' bedroom. He jumped on the bed, startling both of them, and exclaimed with great enthusiasm, "Daddy, tomorrow is today!"

This interesting play on words—"tomorrow is today"—illustrates a valuable point. Everything we hope to accomplish in the future, how we prepare for the responsibilities that will ultimately be ours, is really a function of what we do today. Though some things about the future will always seem uncertain, the future is not entirely a mystery. To a great extent the future is shaped by the accumulation of all our daily activities and disciplined efforts. Remember the teachings of the prophet Alma to his son Helaman: "By small and simple things are great things brought to pass."² Success in life, no matter how it is defined, is

achieved in small steps, day by day, one day at a time. In this sense, tomorrow truly is today.

After working several years to establish our business, I remember having one of my missionary companions, whom I had not seen for several years, visit me at work. As he looked around and saw our organization and all that was being accomplished, he asked, “When did all of this happen?” My response seems obvious yet expresses my feelings for you today. I simply answered, “One day at a time.”

Today, as you look to the future—as your future “commences,” if you will—the words of an often-quoted Chinese proverb are worth taking seriously: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” May I suggest a few small and simple steps that, if taken daily, will contribute to your long-term happiness and ultimate success. You will note that these recommended steps focus more on your personal and spiritual lives, yet, as is always the case, they will bless your professional lives and other pursuits as well.

Seek Spiritual Experiences Every Day

First and foremost, seek to feel the Spirit each and every day of your lives. Work diligently to qualify for the companionship of the Holy Ghost and to recognize the many times the Spirit speaks to your mind and to your heart.

I remember a defining moment while I was serving in the mission office in Chile. One night after dinner, my companion and I were helping the wife of our mission president clear the dishes before we went out to teach. As we finished, and somewhat out of the blue, she asked, “Elder Christensen and Elder Romney, have you felt the Spirit today?” Without waiting for our answer, she began teaching us that one of the most important ways of confirming that we are on the right track is by feeling the Spirit. She continued by emphasizing that, given all the challenges and distractions in life, we need the daily reassurance that we are both

worthy of and guided by the Holy Ghost. She invited us to never go to bed at night without having recognized the feelings of the Spirit sometime throughout the day.

The Lord is anxious to pour out His Spirit on all who seek Him. I love this promise:

*Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*³

Feeling the Spirit each day and drawing near to the Lord requires that we dedicate sufficient time and energy to daily prayer and personal devotion. Studying the scriptures, specifically the Book of Mormon, becomes the most important part of our daily routine.

From my own experience, I have learned that dedicating the effort to nurture feelings of personal revelation, given all of the demands on our time, is challenging at best. Like a resolve to exercise every day to become physically strong, our commitment to daily prayer and scripture study to become spiritually strong must be equally steadfast and absolute.

For me, the best time to draw near to Heavenly Father and feel His Spirit is early in the morning. This requires getting up well before work, classes, or other appointments begin. As suggested in the well-known hymn “Secret Prayer,” we learn: “There is an hour of peace and rest, Unmarred by earthly care, . . . when before the Lord I go And kneel in secret prayer.”⁴ Notice that this hymn speaks of an hour to pray, not simply a few minutes before running out the door.

As we immerse ourselves in prayer and scripture study, we gain eternal perspective and open our hearts and minds to revelation—revelation we might not receive in other ways. My primary invitation as you begin this new season of life is that you dedicate your best efforts to daily seeking spiritual experiences and following the impressions that

will inevitably come. As you do, your priorities will always be aligned with heaven, and you will be inspired in what you say and what you do. Your confidence will indeed wax strong in the presence of God, and the Holy Ghost will be your constant companion and most trusted friend.⁵

Work Productively Every Day with Purpose and Balance

My second invitation is that you continue to work productively every day, yet with expanded purpose and greater balance. Many in the world embrace a philosophy that work is a necessary evil and that the pursuit of leisure and recreation is the primary focus and purpose of life. This philosophy is a direct contradiction to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

I have long been intrigued with how Heavenly Father described His redemptive efforts on our behalf. He declared, “Behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”⁶ Notice that what God does so lovingly and willingly, He calls work. Working hard and being productive is not only gratifying; it is one of the ordained ways we become like our Father in Heaven.

Of course you all know the value of hard work. Work is what qualified you to be here today. You also recognize that today is not the end of your efforts but the “commencement” of a long and productive life filled with work. In fact, one could argue that the whole purpose of all your hard work at BYU is to qualify you for the privilege of being trusted with even more challenging and influential work in the future.

For you, then, perhaps the greater issue is not learning how to work hard but learning how to balance more effectively all of the demands that will inevitably be placed upon you. Please consider the following example shared several years ago by Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. When asked by a group of priesthood leaders

to address the most effective way to balance the demands of family, Church, profession, and personal interests, Elder Nelson responded by first acknowledging that finding a perfect balance is virtually impossible. He then compared trying to balance competing demands to flying an airplane. He explained that at times certain aspects of life will cause the plane to tilt to one side. Later, other demands may cause the plane to tilt the other way, back and forth, side to side, as we address the many challenges of life. The key, he explained, is simply not to crash.

He continued by recommending that we invite someone, perhaps a spouse or other trusted friend, to always be there, hands firmly planted on the control stick to help bring us back into balance when necessary. Finally, Elder Nelson compared the fuselage or main body of the airplane to the Savior Jesus Christ. He stated that everything we do in life—how we spend our time, how we invest our talents—should be connected to bringing us closer to the Savior.⁷

As many of you are focused on making career choices or on other important steps, consider this quote by Elder Neal A. Maxwell: “While [your] career choices are clearly very important, [they] do not mark your real career path. Instead, brethren [and sisters], you are sojourning sons [and daughters] of God who have been invited to take the path that leads home.”⁸

As we progress on the path that leads home, our focus must be on living fully the gospel of Jesus Christ and on placing the utmost priority on those things that matter eternally—specifically on home and family. Even though we live in a world where the value of family is often questioned, our protection as individuals, as a people, and as a society comes from defending the purpose of marriage and family. Let me quote from Barbara Bush, wife of President George H. W. Bush and mother of President George W.

Bush. In a commencement speech given to the women of Wellesley College during the time she was serving as First Lady and living in the White House, Barbara Bush said:

Whatever the era, whatever the times, one thing will never change: Fathers and mothers, if you have children, they must come first.

*. . . Your success as a family, our success as a society, depends not on what happens in the White House **but on what happens inside your house.***⁹

Whatever your daily work will be, however you choose to concentrate your efforts, I invite you to focus on the preeminent goal of becoming more like the Savior Jesus Christ and on blessing the life of your spouse and the lives of your children. If you keep the focus on your ultimate destination, you will never fly too far off course.

Find Ways to Daily Serve Others

My final suggestion relates to the declarative statement “Enter to learn; go forth to serve.” We now invite you to seek daily opportunities to serve others. Interestingly, we become familiar with the Lord’s voice by immersing ourselves in the scriptures,¹⁰ yet we become familiar with the Lord Himself and become His disciples by doing what He did: serve others.¹¹ Seeking daily opportunities to serve those around us brings us closer to the Savior and to a deeper understanding of life’s real purpose.

Recently, in an early morning meeting with fellow General Authorities, we began by singing “Have I done any good in the world today?” You remember the words:

Have I done any good in the world today?

Have I helped anyone in need?

Have I cheered up the sad and made someone feel glad?

*If not, I have failed indeed.*¹²

As we finished singing, one of our companions exclaimed, “Wow, that’s a lot of pressure to put on us at eight o’clock in the morning!”

While setting a goal to do good in the world every day may sound ambitious, those who do so find that opportunities abound. The distraction, it seems, is that we get so wrapped up in our own lives that we miss the needs of others all around us. To go an entire day and miss serving those who desperately need our help is to live far below our privileges. As the Savior taught, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”¹³

Commenting on this verse of scripture, President Thomas S. Monson taught:

*I believe the Savior is telling us that unless we lose ourselves in service to others, there is little purpose to our own lives. Those who live only for themselves eventually shrivel up and figuratively lose their lives, while those who lose themselves in service to others grow and flourish—and in effect save their lives.*¹⁴

Finding ways to serve others, whether early in the morning or late at night, is essential to achieving spiritual balance and purpose in our lives. Our best example is the life of our beloved prophet, President Thomas S. Monson. Even as he leads the affairs of a worldwide Church, his focus continues to be on his personal ministry. I cite just one such example.

One day President Monson received a phone call from a woman he did not know. She explained that her father, Bernardo Salas, was dying of cancer and that his great desire was to meet President Monson before he died. She left an address and asked if the prophet would consider visiting her father.

According to President Monson, as he left the office that night, he felt impressed to visit Brother Salas in his home. In rather heavy traffic and with dimming lights, President Monson several times missed the street where Brother

Salas lived. After offering a silent prayer, he felt impressed to turn around and attempt to find the home driving from the opposite direction. As he approached the street, he noticed a street sign lying on the ground and a tiny residence some distance from the main road. Driving into the lane, he was greeted by a small girl who ushered him into the house. President Monson speaks tenderly of the blessing he shared with Brother Salas and of his opportunity to minister to the Salas family.

In President Monson's own words he shares how he felt upon leaving the Salas home:

*As I drove homeward, I reflected on the special spirit we had felt. I experienced, as well, as I have many times before, a sense of gratitude that my Heavenly Father had answered another person's prayer through me.*¹⁵

The scriptural passage "I was sick, and ye visited me"¹⁶ is not simply a catchphrase for President Monson; it is his constitution for life and the true course to eternal happiness.

Conclusion and Testimony

My dear brothers and sisters, on this special day of commencement I hope you will take a few minutes to reflect on how a multitude of seemingly small choices have qualified you for the rich blessings of a loving Heavenly Father and have brought you to this point in life. More important, I invite you to look forward and think about how the small steps you will take in the days to come will allow Heavenly Father to assure your destiny and ultimate happiness in the future. I share my personal witness that what Heavenly Father has in store for you begins now. Please consider how your lives will be affected as you (1) seek spiritual experiences every day, (2) continue to work hard with purpose and balance, and (3) look

for opportunities to serve everyone around you. Indeed, your future will be blessed as you come to understand that what you do each day shapes who you will become in the future—that tomorrow truly is today. I express my personal congratulations and best wishes to each and every one of you on this special day and leave my testimony and this message with you in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See M. Russell Ballard, "Follow the Doctrine and Gospel of Christ," CES fireside for young adults, Brigham Young University, Provo, 7 November 2010.

2. Alma 37:6.

3. D&C 88:63.

4. "Secret Prayer," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 144.

5. See D&C 121:45–46.

6. Moses 1:39.

7. Used by permission of Elder Russell M. Nelson.

8. Neal A. Maxwell, in *CR*, April 1998, 51; or "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel," *Ensign*, May 1998, 38.

9. Babara P. Bush, "Remarks of Mrs. Bush at Wellesley College Commencement," 1 June 1990; wellesley.edu/PublicAffairs/Commencement/1990/bush.html; emphasis added.

10. See D&C 18:35–36.

11. See Mosiah 5:13.

12. "Have I Done Any Good?" *Hymns*, 2002, no. 223.

13. Luke 9:24.

14. Thomas S. Monson, in *CR*, October 2009, 83; or "What Have I Done for Someone Today?" *Ensign*, November 2009, 85.

15. See Thomas S. Monson, in *CR*, April 2007, 60; or "The Priesthood—A Sacred Gift," *Ensign*, May 2007, 60.

16. Matthew 25:36.