

A Few Secrets of Life

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Elder Holland, President Worthen, honored guests, graduates, friends, and families, you are a beautiful sight. There is a buzz in the air of hard work and accomplishment. I like how I feel when I am with you.

What a wonderful day it is for parents who have helped and supported both financially and emotionally to get you graduates to this point. You have made friends, have struggled to meet deadlines, have learned to exist on next to nothing, have had fun, have had trials, and have survived it all. I feel privileged to spend time with you today.

I learned a long time ago to always listen to old men who, like me, are nearing the end of their lives. They always talk about what matters, not about what seems to matter. Now this is not an announcement, but I am certainly closer to that event than you graduates are. So for my theme today I want to use the following statement:

*On the day you were born, you cried and your family and friends rejoiced. Live your life so that when you die, others cry and you rejoice.*¹

What do I mean by that? When you are looking back on your life, you will want to have the feeling that you used your time in mortality well, that you learned and grew a lot, that you chose wisely, and that you became all that you needed to become.

Often when people have lived a life that has earned the respect and love of those around them, there is sadness when they are gone. Those who are left behind no longer have their presence and wisdom that they have come to rely on—and that can be a reason to cry. Choose to live so that when it comes time to graduate from this life, you leave behind a legacy—one such that others will cry and you will rejoice.

In some ways this statement is the practical essence of God's plan of happiness and eternal progression for us. We have a certain amount of time in mortality, and in that time we make choices that help us grow and stretch—choices that help us *become*.

Bradley D. Foster, a General Authority Seventy, delivered this commencement address on April 27, 2017.

I really like something the cartoonist Bil Keane used in one of his comic strips:

*Yesterday's the past, tomorrow's the future, but today is a gift. That's why it's called the present.*²

With this gift of time, you won't always be able to choose what happens to you, but you can always choose how you handle what happens to you.

Develop your legacy intentionally. Determine right now how you will measure your life when it is over, and then choose accordingly.

Today I have three secrets of life to share with you.

First Secret

God has given us two things in life: *time* and the *opportunity* to choose what you do with it.

This is your turn on earth. In eternal time, it is like a minute. There are only sixty seconds in it. We can't refuse it. But it is up to us to use it. We must suffer if we lose it. We must give an account if we abuse it. It is just a tiny little minute, but your eternal future lies within it. Now don't you miss it.

In the book of Helaman, Nephi described his time as "our days."³ Friends, these are our days.

What do our days look like in the world that we live in? The Lord gave us a hint when He said, "It must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things."⁴ But He also gave us opportunities to choose so we can learn from that opposition.

I have learned much from a book entitled *Why Did This Happen to Me?* by Ray Pritchard. Mr. Pritchard said:

*Sometimes we will face things for which there is no earthly explanation. In those moments we need to erect a sign that reads, "Quiet: God at Work." Meanwhile, hold on, child of God. Keep believing. Don't quit. Don't give up. Let God do His work in you. The greatest tragedy is to miss what God wants to teach us through our troubles.*⁵

This life isn't easy. It wasn't designed to be. It is very hard. These are the last days, but you are a chosen generation blessed with what you need for these times. You have lived in the promised land, but it is not Disneyland. Throughout your lives, all of you will experience both success and failure. Do not be too anxious for the applause for the success or for the pity for the failure. Remember, the common denominator in both success and failure is that neither of these conditions is permanent.

President Howard W. Hunter taught us:

*If our lives and our faith are centered upon Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, nothing can ever go permanently wrong. On the other hand, if our lives are not centered on the Savior and his teachings, no other success can ever be permanently right.*⁶

So it is up to you. Let me add a few words to Berton Braley's poem titled "Success":

*If you want a thing bad enough
To go out and fight for it,
Work day and night for it,
Give up your time and your peace and your sleep
for it, . . .
If you'll simply go after that thing that you want,
With all your capacity, . . .
Faith, hope and confidence, stern [tenacity], . . .
If dogged and grim you besiege and beset it,
[If you determine now how you will measure
your life in the end,
You'll get it!]⁷*

Second Secret

Know who you are in relation to God and to each other. When you really understand this, you will act differently and will treat others differently.

Let me tell you a story about some children who knew who they really were and who understood their relationships to each other.

The story occurred at a track and field meet for children with special needs. The children had trained and were so excited for this day.

Try to imagine the parents of these physically or mentally challenged children who had decided to run in these races. The parents thought that if their children could win, it would be good for their self-esteem.

The parents sat in the stands waiting for the races to begin. Their children were on the track getting ready for the 100-meter dash. As the gun fired, all nine contestants began to run. Not long into the race, one of the boys fell down, hurt his knee, and started to cry. The other racers, hearing him cry, stopped, turned around, and went back and gathered around him. One little girl with Down syndrome kissed him on the head and said, "Now that will make it better." Together they lifted him up, joined arms, and walked to the finish line together.

To the parents, what had begun as an exciting race was now a little confusing as they watched those little athletes walk to the finish line together. The parents stood and cheered. And they cheered for a long time. They realized that these children knew all along who they really were and what winning really means. The parents thought self-esteem would come from winning, but they learned that self-esteem comes from doing *esteemable* things every day.

Third Secret

Never love anything that can't love you back. Remember, a distraction doesn't have to be evil to be effective.

Now make no mistake: we want you to be competitive, we want you to be successful, and we want you to rise to the top. But you might think owning things will make that easier—the latest cell phones and devices, virtual reality, and surround sound. These things are wonderful to have, but in life the real dance starts when the music stops.

Life is not about accumulation. Life is about contribution.

The world would have you believe that success is all about fame and fortune. But as we have all heard before, money does not buy happiness; it only makes you wealthy. Happiness is not measured in zeros but in relationships.

Now don't be afraid that you won't become the next Mark Zuckerberg or Tom Brady or J. K. Rowling. Here is what ought to scare you to death: that at the end of your life you won't have become who you were supposed to have become while you were here.

John Greenleaf Whittier wrote:

*For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: "It might have been!"*⁸

Graduates, you are ready to launch. And the Lord is counting on you.

The story of Job is a wonderful example of the principles that we have talked about today. At the beginning of the story, Job was described as an upright man who feared God, and God blessed him. Job had vast wealth, a good family, and was important in the community and amongst his peers. Then Job had all of that taken from him.

In Job 29 we find Job remembering the days when he had all those things. His words teach us a very important principle. He recounted, "Oh that I were as in months past."⁹

Now that is a reflection of a man looking back on his life. That will happen to you someday as you reflect back on your lives.

Job went on to say that the Lord had blessed him with the Spirit and that he had had his children around him. Describing his great wealth, he said, "The rock poured me out rivers of oil."¹⁰ It seemed that everything Job had touched had turned to gold. He had had the respect of others. When Job approached, "the young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking."¹¹

Job described those wonderful days, and then he taught us the secret. Job said he had had all of these things

because I delivered the poor . . . and him that had none to help him. . . .

I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.

*I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out.*¹²

The reason Job had all that wealth and status was because he was good to his fellowmen. He did all of the “esteemable” things that we do for those who need our help. Job even went looking for ways to help others.

All along Job knew the secret and the order from which greatness comes. Job also knew who would get him through the dark and difficult days. Job used his time wisely and intentionally. He knew who he was in relationship to God and to others. He loved the right things.

As we seek the Lord, we should remember His promise to us: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . . ; and all these things shall be added unto you.”¹³ We must always seek Him first and not the reverse.

The Lord knows who you are. He knows your circumstances, and He will help you. He will bless you as you bless others. As inscribed at the entrance to this university, “Enter to learn [which you have done]; [now] go forth to serve.” On behalf of your professors, your parents, and your friends, I give you words from a song written by Don Besig:

*The time we had together is almost at an end,
and now we have to try to say good-bye.
There’s so much to remember, and so much still
ahead,
I wish you all the good things you can find.*

*Wherever life may lead you, may you go with a
song in your heart,
and a spirit inside that makes you want to sing.
When you find someone who needs you, may you
share the song in your heart
and discover all the joy that it can bring.¹⁴*

This graduation day is just one beginning of many. When you look back upon this experience called mortality, how will you measure your life? My prayer is that when you graduate from this earth life, you will rejoice and others will cry.

I testify that the Savior lives and that the day will come when we will go to be with Him or He will return to be with us. And when He does, “we shall see him as he is.”¹⁵ And He will see us as we are, or as we have become. May we become like Him I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Popular adaptation of a quote from Homer Edwin Young, *David, After God’s Own Heart* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1984), 46.

2. Used in Bil Keane, *The Family Circus* comic strip, 31 August 1994; emphasis in original. See Barry Popik, “Today Is a Gift—That’s Why It’s Called the Present,” 20 June 2009, “The Big Apple, barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/today_is_a_gift_thats_why_its_called_the_present.

3. Helaman 13:25.

4. 2 Nephi 2:11.

5. Ray Pritchard, *Why Did This Happen to Me? Finding God’s Strength Through Life’s Hurts and Heartaches* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 57; emphasis in original.

6. Howard W. Hunter, “Fear Not, Little Flock,” BYU devotional address, 14 March 1989.

7. Berton Braley, “Success,” *Things as They Are, Ballads* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1916), 17.

8. John Greenleaf Whittier, *Maud Muller* (1856), stanza 53.

9. Job 29:2.

10. Job 29:6.

11. Job 29:8–9.

12. Job 29:12, 15–16.

13. Matthew 6:33.

14. “Go with a Song in Your Heart” (1985); music by Don Besig, words by Don Besig and Nancy Price.

15. 1 John 3:2.