

# *The Art of Living*

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I am delighted to be here with you tonight. It's a great opportunity to be here among you, to be with the missionaries, and to have an opportunity to appreciate the Sabbath day and to keep it holy by being in the right place, at the right time, and especially with the right kind of people.

To introduce my topic tonight, I would like to tell you a little story that happened in a country where there are pharmacies into which you can go and have your weight measured. One day a lady came with her baby and asked the pharmacist if he could weigh her baby. He replied, "Yes, this is possible, but I have a small problem. My scale is so old that when I have such a request I first take the weight of the mother with the little child, then I take the weight of the mother alone. When I have calculated the difference, I can give you the weight of your baby." There was a short silence, and the woman answered, "I'm sorry, but this will not work. I am the grandmother of the child."

You have had a long day already. You've had Church meetings, and you've had time to meditate about many things. I just hope that you will not feel like the grandmother tonight and that we will be able to communicate—to

understand each other using the same common language, the language of the gospel.

Speaking about communication reminds me of the excellent story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. You will remember that there was a time when Snow White's step-mother was questioning her mirror constantly, saying, "Mirror, tell me if I am beautiful." As long as the mirror told her, "Oh yes, you are beautiful," all went well. But then there came the day when she asked the mirror another question: "Am I the most beautiful?" Well, apparently she did not like the answer because she broke the mirror.

Communication between men and women is not easy. What can we say then when this communication is difficult between God and men and women? We do not have a God who is blind, deaf, and mute. We do have a loving, caring, listening, communicating, helping Heavenly

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*Charles A. Didier was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 4 May 1980.*

Father. How does it work? It can be explained in a very simple way by this little story.

One day I was listening to a dialogue between the fingers of my hand. The question they were discussing was who was the most important. The little finger said, "I am the most important one because I am the one who makes the decisions, and I hit the table when I make decisions."

The ring finger said, "I am the most important one because I have the ring, so I am the king."

The middle finger pointed out, "No, I am the most important one because I am the tallest, and because of my size I dominate you."

The index finger said, "I am the most important one because I point at things, and without me you cannot know the direction."

Then the thumb said, "I would like to perform an experiment with each of you. Why don't you try to raise that sheet of paper by yourself?"

All of them tried, but no one succeeded.

At last the thumb said, "Now, try it with me."

All of them tried, one after the other, and to their great amazement they could all pick up the piece of paper with the help of the thumb.

The thumb finally said, "With me everything is possible, but I depend on your help and your cooperation to reach my objectives."

The principle is exactly the same in the Church. We can only reach our objectives with the help of our Heavenly Father.

Now that you understand this principle and because of your faith, I would like to discuss one aspect of your life that will determine the nature of your spiritual life and thus your spiritual future. My topic is the art of living.

Some may raise this question: "If living is still an art today, can it not be left to a daily routine governed by the reality of life and the impositions of a modern world? The answer, when we consider the teachings of the living prophets who represent our Heavenly Father, is *no*, a definite *no*.

My brothers and sisters, this is not a world of alibis and excuses. It seems that in our somehow forced way toward progress we have lost something we can still recover. The problem in our society of consumers is not that we become richer and richer with goods but, on the contrary, that we become poorer and poorer in the face of the new demands of every new day. More and more people are asking for assurance—assurance of new promised happiness, but based on what? What is there at the end of the road for them? Nothing. It seems that they are like tired little children at the end of the day who, after having dismantled their buildings, their towers, and their pyramids, desert their building sets, leaving pieces here and there and everywhere. What an image of despair as we see the destruction of the traditional values of life.

Some people then think that security can be found in collectivism, a system that will help save them from the anguish of a dark or unknown future. However, the true art of living is an art that will put you in front of your responsibilities, that will obligate you to fight (and I do not hesitate to use the word *fight* because you will need to), that will force you to conquer your enemies or die. Civilization is not and was not born of expediency. If we look at past accomplishments in architecture or in science or in any other field, history will show that great men have never selected the easy way. Are we now at a turning point in our attempts to solve our present economic and political issues where we only press for more social requests, always more imperial and irresponsible? The true art of living is an individual matter. Let me share with you an example of what can be done and what can be avoided. It is an excerpt of an interview between Jimmy Carter, when he was a young man, and Admiral Rickover. I was quite impressed by this dialogue as I read it some years ago in a weekly magazine in Belgium. As Jimmy Carter was being interviewed by the admiral, the

admiral asked him a question: "How was your promotion in the naval academy?"

Jimmy Carter, proud of his accomplishments, answered, "Sir, I came out fifty-ninth out of 820 candidates." He leaned back in his seat waiting for congratulations that never came.

Instead, Admiral Rickover asked, "And did you do your best?"

Mr. Carter was ready to say, "Yes, sir," but suddenly he remembered with whom he was speaking, and he also had a vision of numerous occasions at the academy when he could have done a better job. With difficulty, Jimmy Carter said, "No, sir, I did not always do my best."

Admiral Rickover looked at him for a long time and then turned his seat to show that this was the end of the interview. But then he asked one last question that Jimmy Carter never forgot and that he was never able to answer: "Why? Why didn't you do your best?" Jimmy Carter sat for a moment quite moved and then slowly left the room. That question, "Why didn't you do your best?" may be one you and I will have to answer in the future.

There are some recipes that are given that will help us answer it in a positive way and that will enable us to live so as not to be ashamed of our actions. Let me share with you just a little one that is entitled "The Success":

*The father of success is work.*

*The mother of success is ambition.*

*The eldest son is common sense.*

*Some of the other boys are perseverance, honesty,  
Thoroughness, foresight, enthusiasm, and  
cooperation.*

*The eldest daughter is character.*

*Some of the sisters are cheerfulness, loyalty,  
courtesy,*

*Care, economy, sincerity, harmony.*

*The baby is opportunity.*

*Get acquainted with the old man and you will be  
able*

*To get along pretty well with the rest of the family.*

[Yeomen Shiel, *This Is Gordon Owen*,  
Scrapbook Collection (n.p., 1952), p. 32]

The greatest of all the conquests is ourself. In Proverbs we read, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32).

The art of living is easy, if you work hard. It is hard if you choose facility or easiness. Your destiny and your future are in your own hands. May I share with you this little poem from R. L. Sharp about destiny:

*Isn't it strange that princes and kings,  
And clowns that caper in sawdust rings,  
And common people, like you and me  
Are builders for eternity?*

*Each is given a bag of tools,  
A shapeless mass, a book of rules;  
And each must make, ere life is flown,  
A stumbling block or a stepping stone.*

There is an old fable about a king and a jester. The king one day offered the jester a staff and told him that he could have this staff until he found a bigger fool than himself. A little later, the jester again met with the king. The king didn't look well, and he said, "I'm going to leave for a long journey and probably will never return." The jester asked him what provisions he had made for that journey. The king answered, "None." Then the jester handed the king the staff and said, "If you have made no provisions for such a long journey, then the staff belongs to you. You are a greater fool than I." That is something to think about. Are we fools? Are we acting in a foolish way when we know what we know?

I was in Ogden this morning participating in a stake conference, and I had an opportunity to talk briefly with a professor. He is involved in a lot of social work, helping people solve their problems. What he told me was quite interesting. He said, "Everyone who comes

into my office has had a problem for one reason: They have broken one of the commandments, and that has resulted in their problem." Now, it is always the same old lesson. Are we foolish enough that we will not accept the lessons from the gospel, from our teachers, from a living prophet? Or do we still prefer to go our own way, following our own "art of living" which is not the right kind of living? I read something one day while in a doctor's waiting room in Germany about how some people handle one particular problem:

*"The Journal of an Unborn Child"*

*May 1: I was called to life today because of loving parents.*

*May 15: My first veins took shape; my body is shaping;*

*May 19: I already have a mouth.*

*May 21: My heart has started to beat.*

*May 28: My arms and legs have started to grow.*

*June 8: Small fingers are starting to appear on my hands.*

*June 15: My mother learned today that I am alive.*

*June 20: It is evident now that I'll be a girl.*

*June 24: My organs are complete. I can feel now.*

*July 7: I have hair and eyebrows.*

*July 8: My eyes are completed, but my eyelids are still closed.*

*July 19: My heart beats. I feel security and am very happy.*

*July 20: Today my mother killed me.*

Is this the art of living?

Our message in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not a message of despair; it's a message of hope and faith in a world that can be a world of happiness; and it gives us an art of living that shows to us the light at the end of the tunnel rather than continual darkness. The art of living is found in the Church because it is a moral issue; whether we will benefit from it depends on you and me. Our art of living, living temporally or spiritually, depends on our belief in eternal values instead

of mortal values. There cannot be an art of living, a divine art of living, if you do not know a divine God and think, act, and live exactly as he thinks, acts, and lives.

To illustrate my point, I would like to refer to section 29 of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 34 and 35, wherein we read:

*Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created.*

*Behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave unto him commandments, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him, for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual.*

As we go further in the Doctrine and Covenants, let's turn to section 84 to discover to which kind of art of living the Lord is referring:

*And I now give unto you a commandment to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life.*

*For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ.*

*And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit.*

*And everyone that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father.*

*And the Father teacheth him of the covenant which he has renewed and confirmed upon you, which is confirmed upon you for your sakes, and not for your sakes only, but for the sake of the whole world.*

*And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin.*  
[Verses 43–49]

We know it; we have it before our eyes. Then the Lord says:

*And by this you may know that they are under the bondage of sin because they come not unto me.*

*For whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin.*

*And whoso receiveth not my voice is not acquainted with my voice, and is not of me.*

*And by this you may know the righteous from the wicked, and that the whole world groaneth under sin and darkness even now.* [D&C 84:50–53]

It was Cardinal Wojtyla, now pope of the Catholic Church, who said: “The constant danger for the apostle is to shape himself like the spirit of the world in order to be better accepted.”

Our temptation is very similar as we consider that we are, of course, in this world and that decisions have to be made whether to follow the world and its pattern or the Church, which is a divine pattern. May I point out to you that if you have one foot in the Church and the other foot in the world, and that if the world is moving in one direction and the Church is moving in the other direction, it is going to hurt very soon! You have to understand the mechanism. This reminds me of another story about a certain town where an electric generator failed, throwing the inhabitants into darkness. Mechanics and engineers could not figure out what was wrong. They called an aged professor from the university who looked at the generator for a while, asked for a mallet, and tapped on the generator. Suddenly there was electricity again. He was asked to send his bill. The bill amounted to \$1,000.07. The president of the company asked him to itemize the bill. The professor

answered: “Tapping, \$.07; knowing where to tap, \$1,000.00.”

Knowing where to tap requires that we know that we belong to a church that is the true Church of Jesus Christ and that we know our Heavenly Father. Do you really understand the mechanism of the Church? Do you understand that there is only one way and that the world is not giving you that way—this art of living?

In 2 Nephi, chapter 31, we find this statement about what the Church can do for us:

*Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.*

*And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen.* [Verses 20–21]

This is really the explanation of the art of righteous living, the application of which will bring us eternal life. In the thirty-second chapter of Second Nephi, this time in the third verse, we read that we should

*feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.*

*Wherefore, now after I have spoken these words, if ye cannot understand them it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark.*

When we start to live because of our love of Jesus Christ and not because of the fear of others and their criticisms or rules, then, and only

then, will we know the art of righteous living, not the drama of living.

A decision has to be reached while there is still time to reach it. I like this story about Will D. Lae, who was grossly overweight but who was fascinated by the idea of becoming a mountain climber. Determined to master the skill, he was able, through hard work and continuous practice, to develop his arm muscles so that they would support his obese body. He practiced on local slopes and then decided to try his skill on a mountain worthy of his ambitions. He picked the granite face of El Capitán. Halfway up the sheer cliff he looked up and was startled to discover that his rope was fraying and in a second or two would break. He looked down and saw that there was no ledge or bush to break his fall. He made a quick decision—he decided to use a heavier rope. (See Laurence J. Peter, *Peter Prescription* [New York: William Morrow and Co., 1972], pp. 164–65.) Mr. Lae’s decision was right, but his timing was wrong. He had practiced and provided for the climb, but he had overlooked his most important need.

I think that we all are climbing up a rope. How strong is your rope? Will it resist until the end? You can strengthen your rope constantly by making the right decision, timely and wisely. The opportunity is yours and only yours. I cannot make your decisions for you, nor can your parents or teachers; and you cannot make mine for me. But we are not alone, and there are many here who will help us reach the right kinds of decisions. We are a blessed people because of our past history; because of our family history and examples; because of our friends, our teachers, our bishops, our leaders, our country, our university, our Church. It was Aristotle who said that those who have the responsibility of teaching

and educating children should even be more honored than the parents because the parents give life but the others give the art of living.

May these thoughts help you select the art of living that is offered to you in a unique period of our civilization, a period where we have the Church of Jesus Christ on the earth, which is led by a prophet and based on direct revelation for your benefit and for your future happiness.

You may remember the story in the beginning of the Book of Mormon where Lehi had a dream that he shared with his family. His sons were asked to go back to get the records of Laban. You may remember that they tried different methods. They cast lots, they tried to sell their gold and their silver, until finally Nephi, the one who was faithful, said, “Let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord” (1 Ne. 4:1). They then succeeded. There is one short sentence in that fourth chapter of 1 Nephi that tells us why he succeeded, a little sentence that can serve as a key for us today: “And I was led by the Spirit” (verse 6).

Are we prepared today to be led by the Spirit? Do we know what it means to live by the spirit of Jesus Christ, to know him, to talk to our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ? It is important that in this difficult period of time we know there is a church to help us, a church, as I said, led by a living prophet and based on direct revelation. I testify to you that I know that this Church is true, that President Kimball is a living prophet, that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior, our Redeemer, and that there is a plan of salvation that is an art of living and that has been prepared by my Heavenly Father to help me prepare to meet him; and I am very happy to be able to share this testimony with you, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

