

# *Our Spiritual and Temporal Foundation: Scriptures and Revelation*

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Any listening to a talk or any reading of a book starts with an introduction. As you may be familiar with the Book of Mormon and particularly the first verse, may I personalize its introduction in this way: I, Charles Didier, was born in Belgium—and, paraphrasing Nephi—of goodly parents. Alas, the similitude stops there; I was not taught somewhat in all the learning of my father and in the knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God! Therefore I would like to share with you today a short record of my proceedings in my early days as a student in that country.

And it came to pass that I was blessed by the Lord because of my faith in Jesus Christ, for I sought Him diligently, with lowliness of heart, and later I was also led to this land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands (see 1 Nephi 2:19–20). Here I am addressing you at BYU, Provo, USA—the university that is choice above all other universities.

I started my student life by attending the University of Liege in Belgium. At that time I made two of the most important decisions regarding my temporal and spiritual futures. One was about a temporal career by choosing the School of Economics, the other about a spiritual career by deciding to be baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The university I attended was secular—an institution of higher learning but without the benefits you have of spiritual devotionals or even inspirational talks given by church leaders or academic and prominent personalities. Sporting or social events or athletic programs did not exist and were not part of the curriculum. Everything was focused on learning and acquiring secular knowledge to prepare for a temporal career. There was no code of honor; there was never any mention of religion or service; there were no members of the Church around. I was the only member in the whole university. It seemed that spiritual matters had no place in that environment.

I had to find the spiritual aspect of my life in a different environment—the Church. At that time there were about 150 members in our small district. We were a real minority among 10 million people—a rare species! Spiritual and temporal survival was a constant struggle.

As students we were a generation coming out of World War II to face the challenges and

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events of the future and to prepare a better world in the midst of the Korean War and the so-called Cold War. Communism, instead of fascism, was the new threat. We were left to ourselves to make crucial choices about our future with little help from anyone. It was a time when you had to learn what and how to think, what to expect, and how to hope. It was all about making right choices. Graduation was the major preoccupation and hope the expected end result, but the chances to achieve this goal were slim. We started with a class of 100 students in that four-year cycle, but out of that group only 25 graduated!

During those challenging years I learned that the source of true knowledge was not just secular knowledge. Another dimension needed to be added: a foundation of spiritual knowledge. That came as the result of a personal quest, an exercise of faith, seeking diligently to preserve and defend the truth of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The scriptures and revelation representing true doctrine became my spiritual and temporal foundation: “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). The answer determined the various roles that I would play in society.

This short record of my student approach to life represents quite a contrast with your life and your attendance at this Church institution, BYU—the purpose of which is portrayed by the words “Enter to learn; go forth to serve.” These words represent a vision of what is expected and what is hoped for. President Gordon B. Hinckley emphasized this vision by saying, “I invite you, every one of you, to make that your motto” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “Remarks at the Inauguration of President Cecil O. Samuelson,” *BYU 2003–2004 Speeches* [Provo: BYU, 2004], 103). President Samuelson, in his first impressions as your president, said:

*I would hope [the students] will leave BYU with the ability and capacity to think and be*

*comfortable that they know how to think. I also hope they recognize that even in a world of uncertainties, there are some fundamental and basic values that will always prevail, even though there will be changes in the environment in which they will need to adapt.* [Cecil O. Samuelson, in Shinika A. Sykes, “From Red to Blue,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 24 August 2003, A6]

What is the difference between my situation of the past and yours of the present as an individual? It is that fundamental spiritual and moral values were not part of my university’s curriculum. These were left for the students to explore if they had such an inclination, which rarely happened. Our motto could have been stated, “Enter to learn; go forth to serve yourself”!

Today, with the new threat of terrorism, the world is still in commotion. Confusion about moral standards has increased, and the decline and retreat of human values has accelerated, as witnessed by the media. A new culture promoting the ethic of self-satisfaction—eliminating moral rules and replacing them with our own pleasing rules—is the fashion. Your challenge to become the next generation of leaders who will face and help find solutions to these issues is very similar to that of past generations. As Church and university leaders, we are here to help you in this spiritual thinking process; you are not left alone to go forth to serve.

We are entering an era of the history of the world where we are exactly where the prophets warned we would be. The Apostle Paul prophesied word by word, phrase by phrase, describing our present situation:

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.*

*For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*

*Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,*

*Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;*

*Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

*For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,*

*Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. [2 Timothy 3:1–7]*

Is there a solution to this dark description of our times? There is. It is to build your spiritual and temporal foundation upon scriptures and revelation. It is to learn how to oppose the world's evil trends. By doing so you will be affecting your personal life, your environment, and this university and the role you play in it. The kind of role, right or wrong, played by the individual in a society or institution is of utmost importance. It determines the future of that society or institution.

For example, remember the role played by former President Ronald Reagan in the liberation of oppressed people. The greatest compliment that could be given to him was that he did not play the role of the president of this nation; he acted as a president who knew what his role was, the president of a nation that had strong beliefs in freedom as a true principle. He understood what the United States represented in the world: the symbol of freedom. President George W. Bush eulogized Reagan with these words: "He believed that America was not just a place in the world, but the hope of the world" ("President Bush's Eulogy at Funeral Service for President Reagan," 11 June 2004, Washington, D.C.; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/06/20040611-2.html>). And that happens because of the beliefs and subsequent behavior of people.

Another great statesman, Aristide Briand, a Nobel Peace Prize winner from France and

one of the animators of the League of Nations (precursor of the United Nations), said that the institutions are worth what the individuals are worth. A prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, wrote, "Reformation of the world begins with reformation of self" ("In Opposition to Evil," *Ensign*, September 2004, 4).

By the same analogy it could be said that the worth of this institution depends upon the worth of its students. This worth—the personal and moral value of the student—will rise or decline according to his or her belief in the true principles and doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Belief affects who an individual is. Faith determines behavior and actions. This is the spiritual side of your life as a student. Brigham Young said:

*There is neither man or woman in this Church who is not on a mission. That mission will last as long as they live, and it is to do good, to promote righteousness, to teach the principles of truth, and to prevail upon themselves and everybody around them to live those principles that they may obtain eternal life. [JD 12:19]*

Being on such a mission as a believer in Christ and acting on the knowledge that His gospel is true makes a difference in our society and in the Church. The Lord Himself emphasized this very principle, saying, "This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people" (Mosiah 27:13).

The combination of the spiritual and temporal aspects of your life is essential and cannot be divided according to circumstances or the environment. How do you perceive your role as students in this BYU institution? You are to be not only responsible university students—the temporal aspect—but also responsible members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—the spiritual aspect. These two responsibilities cannot be disassociated to satisfy egocentric needs or wants as the world

tempts you to do. Your question now should be: *What can I do today to improve the world of tomorrow?* Your answer now should be that you will make choices that correspond to these two fundamental responsibilities. Choices are made thanks to the use of your agency. Your future, temporal or spiritual, is a result of righteous choices based on thinking about the value of that agency.

How many of you have planned to graduate academically from this university and graduate spiritually from the Church? By the same token, how many of you have planned to fail to graduate academically and spiritually? No volunteers? Did you notice that I used the word *planned* in my question? You will succeed by planning or fail by lack of planning or by indifference in your life. You will succeed by making right choices or fail by making unrighteous choices or by indecision. Success is always a result of unlimited attention to a purpose. Your purpose must be to create, literally, your plan of salvation, temporally and spiritually. Your failure will be a result of not having such a plan or not practicing what you planned. Remember that faith without works is dead!

Life planning—what you would like your life to be—depends on the principles in which you believe, on your faith, and on what you believe should be your place in the world. How do you plant the seeds of righteous beliefs in your mind and in your heart? How will you make righteous decisions affecting your behavior if you do not have that foundation? This is why President Boyd K. Packer, when talking to the mission presidents about missionaries' conduct, said:

*Teach them doctrine [the principles, the beliefs]. . . . The study of doctrine will change behavior more quickly and more permanently than the study of behavior will.*

*The scriptures are rich with information and inspiration about discipline.*

*You [mission presidents] must learn and they [missionaries] must learn what the revelations say about conduct. If you visit the scriptures only in time of emergency, you may miss the very verse that will tell you plainly what to do against a very serious challenge.*

*Your guide as to handling problems of discipline is found in the revelations. That is our book of principles and our book of law. [“Discipline—Principles to Consider,” Seminar for New Mission Presidents—2000 (20 June), 1; emphasis in original]*

The Apostle Paul taught this very truth 2,000 years ago when he said, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God . . . for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Apostles used the words *inspiration* and *revelation* as the source of true knowledge.

Let us examine this teaching of making right choices based on a belief in righteous principles. What about our clothing and our physical appearance on this campus or in other circumstances? Does it matter, or does it make a difference in your behavior and influence your environment if you wear baggy or immodest clothes or tattered jeans? Does what I read in the Honor Code about modesty really apply to you? “Modesty and cleanliness are important values that reflect personal dignity and integrity, through which students, staff, and faculty represent the principles and standards of the Church” (Dress and Grooming Standards, BYU Honor Code).

I cannot resist quoting from one of your professors, S. Neil Rasband, stating that what you wear affects the educational environment:

*What about torn or tattered jeans? They simply suggest that someone is unable to distinguish between being engaged with intellectual challenges and working on the welfare farm. They're dressed for barn work, not for brain work. . . .*

*Next time you are tempted to wear something that is too casual or inappropriate to class, think*

*of what you are communicating to yourself and others. Think about the attitudes and manners you are adopting by wearing it. Think about the effect it will have on your learning and your learning environment. Then ask yourself, "Do I really want to wear this?" ["Viewpoint: Do I Really Want to Wear This?" BYU NewsNet, 5 November 2002, <http://newsnet.byu.edu/story.cfm/40706>]*

Once again our opinion about the way we dress depends on our beliefs, our principles, and how well we make choices in agreement with those principles.

The same choices about what is right and what is wrong also apply to language, tattoos, body piercing, pornography, transgressions, and whatever else you may have to consider in your daily life. Key indicators will help you in the decision process: learning doctrine and principles from the scriptures and revelation and thinking, asking, deciding, and answering about your choices. Life is made of not only daily problems but also daily solutions. The solutions of problems are always found in the resources that are available to us and that come from a loving God. He gives us divine knowledge about our nature and our destiny. He gives us answers about our behavior, what to do. An example is the prophet Micah teaching, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8).

Solutions always come by revelation, and revelation becomes reality in our lives when we put it into action to become a testimony. A testimony is the assurance of the reality, the truth, that comes by divine personal confirmation from the Holy Ghost. That personal revelation is usually the confirmation in your mind of what you already know in your heart. Elder Henry B. Eyring said, "The words of God in pure doctrine go down deep into the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost" ("We Must Raise Our Sights," *Ensign*, September 2004, 17).

However, "there is an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11), as we may have learned not only from the scriptures but also by personal and painful experience. Jacob, in the Book of Mormon, taught this principle and some others for our profit and our learning (see 2 Nephi 2:14). He also taught about freedom, saying that we are

*free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for [ourselves] and not to be acted upon. . . .*

*. . . Free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil. [2 Nephi 2:26–27]*

Opposition is not only found out in the world. It may also be found among good friends, even among returned missionaries. Individual freedom to think, to speak, or to act is easily misunderstood in our day as meaning the abolition of rules or the elimination of codes. Obedience is a test of humility. Walking humbly with the Lord helps us to understand what is right in the eyes of the Lord. The proper role of a disciple of Christ is determined by Christ, not by us: "What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27).

So if we accept the notion that our behavior is a result of our beliefs and principles and that this behavior will affect not only us but also others and our environment, we also need to accept that this belief must be centered in the great Mediator, Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer and the Son of the living God. We need to recognize that the principles and the doctrine to guide us are found in the gospel of Jesus Christ, where the *how, when, what, where, who* questions about this life and the next are answered.

The challenge is that as we learn to conquer this freedom to act for ourselves, we also are tempted to try to escape it for fear of being rejected by others. For example, are we not



tempted at times, voluntarily or not, to escape the consequences of our spiritual choices and hide from the responsibility that is ours because of the covenants that we made in the waters of baptism and renewed by partaking of the sacrament that we would always remember Jesus Christ and His Atonement? Don't some try to escape the duty of marriage as ordained from God and replace it with a worldly substitute called cohabitation or by not even considering marriage? Is it unusual today for some to escape the principles directing the union of a man and a woman—called marriage—by accepting alternative lifestyles? What about the escape from the sanctity of marriage and its eternal nature by finding an easy exit called divorce? What is your thinking about the escape from the purpose of marriage—procreation, the principle to form eternal families of our own—by forsaking the plan of our Heavenly Father?

Again, this is why it is so important not just to know who you are but to know who you can become; not just to exist but to know how to live; not just to hope but to achieve; not just to dream but to realize. My life as a Church leader has been profoundly influenced by these simple words: "Do it! Do it right! Do it right now!" (in David L. Olpin, *Quiet Success Thoughts* [Provo: D. L. Olpin, 1983], 135).

By revelation we know that this life is the time for us "to prepare to meet God" and "to perform [our] labors" (Alma 34:32). It is also revealed that we will be proved "to see if [we] will do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command" (Abraham 3:25). Thus choices based upon divine knowledge, divine beliefs, and divine principles become essential for our temporal and spiritual salvation and, especially, for our happiness.

Happiness during your student life or after will be a result of your spiritual choices. It is a personal task, it cannot be delegated! Someone a few years ago said: "If you have a happy life, it is not because you found it that way; it

is because you made it that way." If you know the way, then you can invite others to follow you. If you know the truth, then you can share it. If you know the doctrine and the principles, then you will live in harmony with the understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and you will become a light and give worth to your life.

Scriptures and revelation teach us not only the doctrine of the reality of God and our role in His plan of salvation but also the need to understand this doctrine. Strangely enough, some of the great thinkers of our time discovered the same principle as they tried to find a reason for our existence and the final end of it. One of them was Jean Jacques Rousseau, a philosopher of the 18th century. Orphaned when his mother died in childbirth, abandoned by his father at age 10, and raised by an aunt, he was virtually self-educated. All of his principles of philosophy rested on the quest of listening to his conscience, his soul. Wouldn't we call that the Light of Christ today? Preoccupied by the search for happiness and the destiny of the human being, he believed that this search had to go far beyond the temporal to reach the spiritual or supernatural. At the end of the preface of his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau quoted a verse from the Latin author Perse: "Man, learn what God wants you to be" (Aulus Persius Flaccus, *Satires*, III, line 71).

Scriptures and revelation teach us the doctrine of the purpose of life—what God offers us to be and to become. The doctrine is centered on Jesus Christ: "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). This scripture helps us to have a spiritual long-term vision of the world and our role in it. It gives us hope. On the contrary, if we look at the doctrine of the purpose of life according to the world, we will find a life centered on the fulfillment of the self. This will not help us. It will only give us a limited short-term vision of the world and our role in it. Righteous principles are being replaced by false principles centered

on the satisfaction of carnal urges. It is a culture of hedonism rife with sexual pleasure; addictions; and easy money acquired through cheating, gambling, and lotteries. This worldly doctrine invites intellectual and moral laziness, summarized in one sentence during the 1968 intellectual revolution in France and on U.S. campuses: "It is forbidden to forbid!" It does not give hope; it creates despair and leads to destruction, as this type of life always ends rapidly and inevitably in the bottom of a pit where the exit too often is suicide.

Scriptures and revelation teach us the very doctrine of hope in the Atonement of Jesus Christ and tell us about our divine nature and our divine destiny. As children of our Heavenly Father, we were created with hope within ourselves, with the Light of Christ, with a divine potential. Physical death is not an end, therefore. It is only the beginning. It is a transfer of existence—of mortal life to immortal life—due to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the reality of reaching our final destination to live in the presence of our Heavenly Father because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ liberating us from spiritual death and transforming the natural man into a spiritual man.

Scriptures and revelation help us to understand the vital role that we have in this world because we have received true knowl-

edge through living prophets. In scriptures and revelation we find power, the meaning of life, and how to keep ourselves spiritually alive.

We are back where we started. We live in perilous times, as declared by the prophets. As Moroni finished the record of his father, Mormon, he said to us: "I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not" (Mormon 8:35). And in the final chapters of the Book of Mormon, Moroni included his father's testimony:

*My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever. [Moroni 9:25]*

Your belief in Jesus Christ and in the principles of the doctrine of His gospel as a foundation of the secular knowledge that you are receiving here will be the determining factor of your role in this institution today and in the world tomorrow. May I conclude with my personal testimony of the scriptures and revelation and confirm that Jesus is the Christ, that He is my rock and my foundation in my life, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.