

The Game of Life

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This is an awesome sight, brothers and sisters, and I am humbled by it. I pray for the inspiration that would be required to teach perhaps a principle or two.

President Oaks, faculty, and student body, I bring you special greetings from part of your number in Austria and from those just returned to Austria from Israel. It was my privilege last week to attend a Mozart concert in Salzburg, along with my good wife and another couple. How delighted we were to be approached by a number of your fellow students who are studying there. I asked if there was one message I could take back, and—typical of those who are away from our country, away from home and this great University—it was their desire that you realize the blessings and opportunities provided here. I am pleased to indicate that they are well and happy in the work.

I am pleased also to recognize BYU's great baseball team. To you, Coach Glen Tuckett and Coach Vernon Law, we are all pleased and proud of the great record that you have made. Many eyes have been upon you, and I think it's significant that this school leads the rest of the country in the innovation of bat girls. I don't know what greater motivation a player would need than that. I came down to watch a ball game or two, and I can appreciate why Coach

Tuckett and Coach Law counseled these players to keep their eyes on the ball. We salute you ladies who have set such a wonderful example.

This prompts me to tell of a little experience I had in Boston some time ago. I recounted this story to a group of BYU employees earlier in the fall. I suppose it wouldn't shake your faith if I told you that while I was on my mission I occasionally took in a ball game. (I believe in being a well-balanced individual.) On this occasion I had my wife and daughter with me, and as I was being escorted to my seat, I noticed that the place next to me was to be occupied by a man of the cloth. (I couldn't tell whether he was Protestant or Catholic because they dress quite similarly now.) It became obvious as the game progressed that he was an avid Red Sox fan. He had an interesting vocabulary and he never hesitated to express it. The game that night was against the New York Yankees. If you know anything about the American League, you can appreciate that there's not a whole lot

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of love between those two teams. Some 33,500 fans filled the park to observe the contest.

The score was nothing to nothing until the eighth inning. Then the first batter for the Yankees singled sharply to right. He took second on a fielder's choice. Now you have this situation: the winning run is on second, one out, and Bobby Mercer at bat. He hit a sharp ground ball to Rico Petrocelli at short. Petrocelli bobbled it momentarily. The ball got through his legs and out onto the outfield grass. Here came the winning run around third. Boston was going crazy. A perfect strike to the plate, a cloud of dust, human flesh crashing, and then the decision by the umpire—"Safe!" Well, you could image, I suppose, the mayhem in Boston over that decision—but particularly the man on my right. He was now standing in his seat with a fist clenched. These were his words, and I shall never forget them: "Thou hast eyes but seest not!" I suppose there's a great sermon in that.

The story concerning an umpire prompts yet another. It seems that on the other side of the veil there was to be a contest between the hosts of heaven and the other force below in a baseball game. The two coaches got together; and one, a heavenly messenger, said to one of the imps of the adversary, "Do you realize what you're asking?"

He said, "I think so."

The messenger said, "You recognize, of course, that in heaven we can field a varsity team of former hall-of-famers."

"Yes," the little imp said, "but you ought to understand that we have all the umpires."

I am sure BYU's team probably has thought that a number of times in games they have played.

Run to Win

Inasmuch as we're honoring BYU's baseball team today, let me take something of an athletic theme as a text. I guess it doesn't surprise some of you to learn that there are scriptures

regarding athletics in all of the standard works of the Church. One of your great teachers, Robert Matthews, brings to our attention some athletic terms that the apostle Paul used in several of his letters, and he prefaces his work with this comment:

Every two years in Corinth (and also, of course, in other cities) games were held in which all the sports which the Greeks loved, such as footracing, boxing, jumping, wrestling, javelin and discus throwing, and chariot racing, were presented. The prize was a mere wreath, or crown, of pine twigs or ivy leaves, but a winner was welcomed in his native city with great honor. Rigorous training and long practice were required in order for a person to qualify and to participate in these events. A contestant had to go beyond mere amusement and had to discipline himself by constant, severe effort in order to be a winner. In proclaiming the gospel, Paul makes several references to these athletic events. He speaks of boxers, fighters, runners, and the course they run. He speaks of gladiators fighting wild beasts, of a crown for the winners, of goals, of prizes, severe training, proper conditioning, the starter, the judge, and above all the will to win. The early Christian converts were no doubt familiar with these events and games. And, therefore, Paul used the vocabulary of the athlete to urge his listeners to apply the gospel into their lives and particularly to show them the importance of self-discipline and self-denial.

Brother Matthews goes on to say that Paul probably stood in one of those great stadiums of the Greek games of his time and watched the marathon runners as they would go up and lay aside their armor. They used to practice running in their armor, and then they would lay it down for the race. The starter would set them off; they would run 26 ¼ miles, going out into the neighboring village and back on the road, finishing up in the stadium. At the conclusion of the race, the judge would award the prize to the winner. Paul probably watched

such a race and saw a great vision of life when he said these words:

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. [Hebrews 12:1–2]

Paul perceived in sports one of the greatest things that training can offer: the will to win. He saw those champions crowned in victory, and he saw the wreath that they had received, and he saw that one day he would stand triumphant and receive the greatest crown of all, the crown of eternal life. Paul knew how these great men strove for victory, and he knew of the zeal and vigor with which they went into the race, and he saw that the Christian was likened unto them. The illustrations Paul used are particularly suitable because of their religious significance. Like Jesus, Paul was skilled in the use of vivid illustrations drawn from current events. He pointed out that the price of victory in the gospel sense as well as in the athletic contest is dependent upon sustained effort, self-discipline, and total dedication.

Now let me quote from his letters. [*Sipping from a glass of water*]: I'm sorry to drink in front of you, but I came home the other day and lost my voice. I hope this will help me bring it back. It does remind me of an experience I had one time. In some parts of Europe and Australia, they don't seem to believe in water. I was speaking in Australia, where water is nonexistent as far as drinking is concerned, and before a large group I started to choke. I had swallowed improperly, as one sometimes does, and I couldn't breathe, couldn't speak. I turned to get some help from those on the stand, and they just shrugged their shoulders. They had a look that seemed to say, "Well, good luck." I was panicky, and I did the only thing a good American would do. I grabbed a vase that was on the stand and took a rose out of it and drank the water.

This is what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? (You see, the Corinthians would understand that.) So run, that ye may obtain." Every athlete, said Paul, exercises self-control in all things. He does it to receive a perishable wreath—just a simple little twig or wreath—but we, an imperishable one. I do not run aimlessly, he went on to say. I do not box as one beating the air, but I pummel my body and subdue it lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:24–27).

Now notice this to his friend Timothy: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Timothy 4:7–8). And then, again to Timothy, Paul made this great admonition on which I would like to make a comment (I appreciate what these young men, as many of you here, represent.) An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules (2 Timothy 2:5). Now, there's a great sermon in a single line. Life is made up of interesting rules and regulations, and one can become the victor only as he competes according to the rules and the regulations of the game. You and I are in the great game of life. There are lots of rules and regulations. Some of us have a hard time occasionally discerning why they apply to us.

I learned as a young high school athlete that rules sometimes are more important than winning. I guess I have shared this experience a time or two around the Church, but I remember when I went in to sign up for varsity baseball. I was fifteen years old. I went over to the gym where the head coach was officed. Scared to death, butterflies in my stomach, I knocked on his door. "Come in," was the reply, and I walked in. He said, "What can I do for you, young man?"

I said, "Where do you sign up for varsity baseball?"

My coach made a very interesting observation. He said, "Do you want to play ball, or do you want to be a champion?" Well, that was kind of crazy. I wanted to play ball.

I said, "I came to play baseball."

"Well," he said, "we're all filled up. Thank you." And he excused me.

I went out, and he shut the door. There was a drinking fountain there, and I took a drink of water and thought, "Well, now, what's that all about?"

Fortunately I had the stamina to knock on the door again. He said, "Come in." I walked in.

I said, "I want to sign up for varsity baseball."

He said, "I asked you a question. Do you want to play ball or do you want to be a champion?"

Finally it sank in. I said, "I want to be a champion."

"Oh," he said. "Then sign here." He said, "At this school *we build champions*. We don't play ball." There's a difference I have learned.

Well, the year went on, and somehow I made the team and had some great and glorious experiences. As we came down to the final innings of the season, Fairfax High (our archrival) and Hollywood (which I represented) ended in a dead heat—a tie. There would be a one-game playoff on Friday afternoon on our home field.

Thursday afternoon our coach got us all out on the ball field. We were standing around him, as players do with their coaches, and he was giving us some instruction, fired-up enthusiasm, motivation. Then he turned and said, "Paul, you'll pitch tomorrow." I was thrilled but scared.

I want to give you a little flashback. This was an interesting coach, not a member of the Church, but a man who had seen in contests the great ability to build youth. He had each boy on his team sign a contract, not a

professional contract, but a contract of rules and regulations. There were some *thou shalt*s and *thou shall not*s, and one of them had to do with the Word of Wisdom, although he had never heard of it. He said, "Now, if you're going to play ball for me, you'll play according to the rules. Is that understood?"

And I said, "Yes, sir," as did all the other players. So we signed our contracts, and he kept them on file and occasionally he would remind us.

Well, as he was giving his pep talk, our all-star second baseman was standing in the circle with his hands on his hips. When the coach made a pass, he stopped and he did a double take. "Jimmy," he said, "is that a nicotine stain on your finger?" Jimmy put out his hand.

He said, "Yes, sir."

Then he said, "Well, don't you know the rule?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"Did you sign a contract with me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know the penalty?"

"Yes, sir." And this was being said in front of the whole team.

He said, "You've lost your privilege. Turn in your uniform."

I almost shouted, but I didn't, "Coach, wait till tomorrow! We've got a game."

Jimmy was batting .380 and as a second baseman had not made an error in league play. And he now had to turn in his uniform. Our coach was the kind of person that kept close to the boys, even when he disciplined them. He didn't lose him, but he wouldn't let him play.

The next day I drew the assignment to pitch. The game went into extra innings, and they beat us one to nothing in the top of the thirteenth. Do you know how it happened? A ground ball was hit to second and the ball went through the substitute's legs, and that proved to be the winning run. Well, I went home that night and literally cried myself to sleep because I wanted to win. You see, I hate to lose.

Well, that was over twenty years ago. I thank God this day for a great man, a great coach, who taught me that playing according to the rules was more important than winning.

The World Needs What You Have

In a very real sense, you and I have been sent to earth to play a very important game, and there are some wonderful rules and regulations attached to it. To those of us who have the common sense and the understanding and the ability to listen to the coaches, I submit that we have a great head coach, Harold B. Lee. You have heard him, the Quorum of the Twelve and all General Authorities, bishops and stake presidents, leaders and wonderful teachers. Do you think all these people are really out to kid you? Or have they been sent at a particular time in your life to assist you in playing the rules better according to the game of life? I submit it's the latter, and I challenge you as a player, in this contest to listen to wise and capable counsel. You're here at this University for a number of reasons. We of the Board of Trustees see two primary ones: (1) to prepare yourself—and prepare you must—to meet the great challenges that the world offers you, and (2) once you have become prepared, to give it to the world, to make this world a great and marvelous and wonderful place in which to live.

I have just come from a 2½-week stay in Europe, and I'd like to testify that the world needs what you have, and it needs it quickly and in great abundance. We see you here training on this campus as the ambassadors for Christ to teach others how to play the game of life. Now, there is a challenge attached to that, young people, as you make preparation for yourselves, for your families, and for the rest of the world. We're a missionary church. You know that as well as I do. The scriptures are replete with counsel from our Heavenly Father through his Son. Let me just remind you quickly of one or two examples. They're not new. You study them more completely here,

I suppose, than anywhere else in the world. Here's a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith contained in section 64 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It was given in September of 1831, shortly after the church was organized. There were not many members, but they had a tremendous and awesome responsibility to share, to give, to teach. This is what the Lord said to a prophet:

Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord's errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord's business.

And he hath set you to provide for his saints in these last days, that they may obtain an inheritance in the land of Zion. [D&C 64:29–30]

Could I just pause and ask a question? How are they going to obtain it if you and I don't give it and give it willingly and effectively? And then he continues:

And behold, I, the Lord, declare unto you, and my words are sure and shall not fail, that they shall obtain it.

But all things must come to pass in their time.

Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great.

Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days. [D&C 64:31–34]

Permit just a personal reference to this. Back in the 1940s my younger brother received a mission call to New England, and (without running through all the details which really don't matter) he was sent to a little community in Nova Scotia called Kentville. There he labored for most of his mission. As some elders and missionaries do, he came home seemingly a failure in terms of convert baptisms. And you know how older brothers are with little brothers who don't produce, don't you? I didn't let him off the hook at all.

Twenty years later, almost to the day, his older brother Paul was called to preside over the same mission. In my first member district conference at Halifax, Nova Scotia, a little lady came up to me after the first session. She said, "Elder Dunn, Elder Dunn, do you have a brother by the name of David?"

And I said, "I believe I do."

And she said, "Was he on a mission in New England?"

I said, "He was."

And then you missionaries would appreciate this. She opened her purse and started through all her pictures. She lifted one out and said, "Is that him?"

I said, "Twenty years ago, that's him."

"Oh," she said, "where is he?"

I said, "He's in southern California."

"Oh, I'd like to communicate with him. He's responsible for bringing me into the Church."

I said, "No, ma'am, you're mistaken. My brother didn't bring anybody into the Church."

"Oh," she said, "I hate to correct *you*, sir, but—" Then she called six other people over, all with great families, who happened to be the backbone of the district at Halifax. And she said, "All of these are because of your brother. We thank God for him."

Out of small things great things shall proceed.

Teach Your Neighbor

Now, missionaries, how do you put that on your weekly chart for comparisons? I just submit that we're all missionaries. I've often thought (as every General Authority does), "If we could somehow unleash, in an organized form, before the whole world, the power that's represented here today." Think of it. Eight thousand, probably more, returned missionaries on this campus alone. Why, that's half the total full-time force in the whole world. Now, could I challenge you as a great university in your own wonderful way to be missionaries, even here in Provo? I know it's a little more challenging and difficult, but there are lonesome people on this

campus. There are those who seemingly are not wanted, who haven't been befriended. There are the inactive; there are those struggling, as well as the thousands of people with whom you come in contact as you go to and fro. The missionary opportunities are no less here than anywhere else in the world.

Permit a "for instance" or two very quickly. You know what the Lord says in section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants. He says it about as simply as it's ever been expressed: "Warn your neighbor" (see D&C 88:81). Your neighbors can be those both in and out of the Church that need any kind of a warning.

I guess I wouldn't be out of order to tell you a little interesting experience that happened to me last year. Before I left on my mission I lived right across the street from the sheriff of Salt Lake City. He is a wonderful, law-abiding citizen, and he has made me more so. When I came home, I sold my house, and moved just around the corner about the same distance away. One day while I was observing construction on my home, which is on a little hill with quite an incline, I pulled the car up, parked it, and got out and walked around to head up to the house. Suddenly the car started rolling backwards downhill, and there were several little children playing at the bottom. I panicked, as any parent would, and ran around and opened the car door. It was rolling fairly fast now. I got halfway in, and the momentum of the car upended me and threw me down on the street. I got my leg in, trying to pump a brake that wouldn't pump, because it's all power steering with power brakes so that nothing worked. I knew I had to divert the path of that car. To make matters more challenging, the car door banged on my leg; with a real prayer on my lips, I somehow got the strength to turn the wheel to divert its path. In doing so, it crossed the street, jumped the curb, and I pruned—and I mean *pruned*—the sheriff's prize maple tree. I really leveled it. The car

went over the tree and through his back fence and came to a stop in his rose garden.

Now, here's the scene. You've got a run-away car with a General Authority on his back in a rose garden. The sheriff looked over the hood of the car and said, "Paul, what in the world are you doing?"

And I couldn't think of anything any better than this. I said, "Sheriff, I'm your new home teacher."

Well, now, that is not the way to warn a neighbor. I don't think the Lord had that in mind, but rather to share feeling and concern and to give help.

Maybe this is more of what he had in mind. An acquaintance of mine became seriously ill not long ago. I hurried up to the Veterans Hospital in Salt Lake City to see if I couldn't attend to some of his needs. He's got some problems. He's not the most active soul in the world, and you can kind of get the picture. There's one around you somewhere.

He was surprised when I walked into the room. "Well, how did you know I was here?"

"Oh, the Lord has ways of sharing this kind of information."

He had a blood condition that had caused his body great distress. It was very serious because of his age. He had tremendous pain in his ankles. He was eating dinner at the time I entered the hospital, so I sat on the edge of his bed and said, "Would it help if I massaged your legs for a minute?" So I massaged him. And I said, "Can I ask you a personal question? Did this sudden illness scare you a little?" I said, "Does the bishop know you're up here? Would you be offended if I told him?" I asked, "Would you like a special blessing?" He nodded yes. "Do you have faith?"

"No," he responded.

"Do you have faith in me?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what faith is?"

"No."

So I sat on the bed and taught him.

You know, I find that most people don't know these things because they haven't been taught; they don't understand. I gave him a little 2 ½-minute talk on faith. The first principles of the gospel are what? Faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Now, if you back up and look at faith, it says what? In the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes we leave that out. So I taught him the principles. He hadn't ever heard that before, and he was sixty-two and had been born and raised in the Church.

I had noticed, of course, when I first went in that there were four other men in the room. It was a ward shared by several men without any privacy. I noticed while I was teaching (although I didn't make it a pronounced sermon as such; it was just between the two of us) that others were straining to hear. So as I stood up in preparation for going around to place my hands upon my friend's head, I turned, as the Spirit prompted me to do so, and I said to the other men lying in their beds, "Gentlemen, may I have your attention please?" They all sat up in bed. I said, "Perhaps you have noticed I am here to visit my friend, who is ill like you. I'm his home teacher. We're members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—Mormons. I haven't had a chance to get acquainted with you; I don't know what your particular faith is, but we believe in assisting each other spiritually. I am here to attempt to do that tonight. I'm going to give this man a special blessing." Then I taught briefly just what that was. I said, "I wouldn't expect you to endorse it or reject it particularly, but would you mind being reverent for a moment as I perform this ordinance for my friend?" And they all just sat there. So I stepped behind (because we had no way of getting privacy), placed my hands upon his head, and blessed him. The Spirit touched both of us, and the tears came without shame from a man who, I guess, hadn't been in church in twenty-two years. When I got all through, we embraced each

other, and I said, "Now, can I ask you a personal question? Did I offend you?"

"Oh no, Brother Dunn," he said, "this is one of the most sacred moments in my life. Thank you." Then I turned to go out, and four other men wanted blessings, two of whom weren't even members of the Church. Now, Latter-day Saints, you don't have to be embarrassed at who you are or what you are. There's a teaching moment awaiting every one of us as we share this most priceless gift which is ours. I pray God that we might catch something of that great vision and the importance of it.

Seize Your Opportunity

Now, I had some other things to talk about, but time won't permit. Let me just leave this challenge with you to get as well prepared as you possibly can on this great campus. I don't know where you duplicate this effort. You can't. This is the Lord's university, presided over by men of God. I know these men as you do. I watch them work. I sit with them. I testify that they have your interests at heart. I pray that you won't be like some who get out into the world and then want to kick themselves because they didn't take advantage of the opportunity. Seize it now while you have it. Make every moment profitable. Live for it. Prepare for it. Then go out and willingly give what you have learned. The world wants what you and I have. We don't have to be embarrassed to teach it, to live it, to testify of it.

God really lives. Jesus is the Christ. Some of you are yet trying to find that. We understand that. You're in what some of the psychologists

call ambivalent age. You vacillate. You want unconsciously the security of youth, of childhood, but you want the maturity and the freedom that go with adulthood. And you vacillate back and forth. Some of you won't drop your anchor until two or three or four years from now. There's one great blessing I learned in the mission field. There are such things as late bloomers. Thank God that we don't judge and prejudge some people right out of this existence. Some of the little guys that I had in that mission who I thought would never wake up have come home, have found themselves, have dropped their anchors, and have become great stalwarts in the Church and the community and have gone on to surpass some of my so-called stars of yesteryear.

Now, you have the potential within you to do everything that you were sent here to do. Just in conclusion, remember it's a great contest. In the game of life, you'll win if you play by the rules. You'll find yourself and the Lord, and then you share the gospel and give it, even on this great campus and in this great community. God bless you. I know he lives. I know Jesus is the Christ. Harold B. Lee really is a prophet. With great personal interest, I watched him as an apostle for over eight years. I have been in conference with him. I have sat in an upper room of the temple with him. I have seen him in his most tender moments. Then I saw, as you did, the mantle fall upon him. He really is a prophet, and, like you, I thank God for that knowledge. May we so give it to the rest of the world, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.