

The Plus Sign

PAUL H. DUNN

What a wonderful sight you are, my brothers and sisters. It is indeed an honor to accept an invitation to come back to this great institution. Your appearance is wonderful. Your influence is great. Your spirit is terrific. You bring to my mind a little story that one of my brethren told not long ago. It seems that a lady and her devoted husband, who had been married some forty years, had parted because of the death of the husband. He had gone bald early in his career and had relented to a hairpiece. Knowing that he was very fastidious and careful about his appearance, his wife wanted to make sure that in his final hours of being on display he would look proper, so she made it very explicit to the mortician that the hairpiece be properly placed. The mortician assured her. Not feeling quite certain yet, she called him back on the phone and said, "Are you sure that this will not be an embarrassment either to my husband or to me?"

He said, "Madam, I assure you we know what we are doing."

A little later she called again and said, "Now, I just want to be doubly sure that he's going to appear the way we want him to appear."

He said, "Madam, let me put your mind at rest. Don't you worry one minute. We have nailed it on." Well, your appearance is all that it

ought to be, and we're grateful for your image, for your impact, and for the great influence you are upon the world.

Now let me put the introduction given me into proper perspective if I might. Maybe the best way to introduce me would be through my mother. Mothers know us as we really are. Recently, when a new book of mine came off the press, a lady friend in Los Angeles approached my mother and said, "Sister Dunn, I see your boy has written another book."

"Yes," my mother replied, remembering my earlier school days, "but I doubt if he can read it."

I just want to share another thought or two. (I guess it's all right in a devotional to tell a story or two.) All of these meetings remind me of the father and young son standing in the church foyer. Noting a plaque on the wall, the boy asked his father what it was. "That was put up in memory of all the brave men who died in the service."

"Morning or evening?" asked the boy.

Paul H. Dunn was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 5 November 1974.

I told another BYU audience that about a year and a half ago I was honored as the alumnus of the year at my old high school in California. I won't plague you with the details, but going back to my campus for the first time in almost twenty years made me very reminiscent of wonderful days. I walked around the campus, through the halls of learning, and even felt a little nostalgia to go to my home-room class, which I did. Lo and behold, I found my desk just as I had left it. Do you know how I recognized it? I'm embarrassed to tell you. I'd carved a little remembrance on the top. It was a beautifully designed tombstone. On it I had inscribed these words: "Here lies Paul Dunn, who died waiting for the bell to ring."

I can't help sharing one other story. Asking his religion class here one day where one could find the Beatitudes, the teacher got this thoughtful reply and suggestion from one of his students: "Have you tried the yellow pages?"

My daughter, who is just in the bloom of her sixteenth year, is busy now with the holiday spirit. This morning we had frost in Salt Lake, and I gather you've had a little experience with it here. It is time now for the holiday season to begin. I was interested, as I was going through my notebook in preparation for the holiday spirit, to come across some delightful letters from young people to Santa. To put you in the festive mood a little early, let me share a few of these with you. These are real letters that were sent to Santa Claus in care of the North Pole, USA:

Dear Santa, how can you tell who are the good children and who are the bad? Please tell me as quick as you can.

Dear St. Nick, could you send me a snorkel and some flippers? I am learning to be a deep-sea diver in the bathtub.

Dear Santa Claus, I love Christmas because at Christmas there's pretty white snow and everybody is nice to everybody, even grown-ups.

Hi, Santa, could you leave me a nice doll for my sister, so she will have something to play with? My mother always makes me play with her.

Dear Santa, can you give a pretty present to my teacher, Miss Lewis, and tell her it came from me, Jeffrey? I think it would help a lot.

Dear Santa Claus, I think you should leave a great big present for my grandma. She knew you when you were a kid.

Hello, Santa Claus, I wrote to you last year that I wanted a surprise, and you left a book. I don't want any more surprises.

Intellectual and Spiritual Education

Let me shift the scene now for a moment. We are in, I think, the world's greatest university, presided over by a Board of Trustees who are committed, along with your administrators, to the glory of God, which is intelligence. I want to congratulate personally each one of you who has found it in your heart to come here to learn, to worship, and to understand. You don't need a lecture from me today on the importance of an education, or you wouldn't be here. I just want you to know that the world, as well as the Church, is counting on the product that you will produce. I see two primary reasons why you and I are here this morning seeking an education and learning more of the Spirit. First of all, the scriptures are rather direct when they say that no man and/or woman can be saved in ignorance. It's impossible. The Savior pointed out that it was truth that would make us free. Ignorance would cast us down. We're here then, basically, to learn how to save ourselves, our families, and our loved ones. That's our primary prerequisite, as I see it, for an education. Second, once

that education is gained—and it's an ongoing process, to be sure—you and I have the moral and spiritual responsibility to give that which we have come to know to others. In a very real sense, we are truly a missionary church. I'd like to talk about those two things this morning.

Overcome Discouragement

This is the time now when the newness of the year has worn a little thin. Drudgery, if you're not careful, has set in. You're in the routine. Chances are that there are a few of you in this great congregation who might be a bit discouraged—particularly during test and grade time. That's normal. There are those who might become so despondent that they feel dropping out is the answer to their prayers. Please hesitate and consider carefully, cautiously, with your counselors, your parents, and others. We need you and you need us. Sometimes discouragement, as you know, is the adversary's greatest tool to thwart your progress and the work of the Lord. If he can keep you in ignorance and not dedicated to building the kingdom, he has literally won a battle. Our desire is to help you win in every respect, with yourself as well as with the world.

Let me share an experience I had out in the South Pacific some years ago as an infantry soldier. This has to do, I think, with discouragement, the feeling of inadequacy at times or wonderment as to whether or not one can persevere to the end. To those of you who are not familiar with military terms, let me explain. As infantrymen out in the Pacific, we used to make what we'd call a dry run on isolated beaches. We'd take an innocent island and, with LCVPs (landing craft vehicles), make a practice assault on the beach in order to get the feel of what combat would be like. We selected an island way out in the middle of the ocean on one occasion. Our particular regiment went ashore. We were to simulate combat conditions, so I was assigned to take a patrol into the shrubs. Lo and behold, about five hundred

yards inland, we came upon a very friendly native village. But a very interesting sight was noted by all of us. Every man, woman, child, and beast, including dogs and cattle, was wearing green beads with three tiny shells attached to the end. That naturally created curiosity in the infantrymen's minds.

Later we learned from a Baptist minister who had been serving in that vicinity that the people were very religious and superstitious. The beads were to ward off evil or failure or discouragement or even the temptation of death. The people used these beads as their good luck charms. At the time, the beads recalled to my memory the days when some of us as kids carried a good luck charm or a rabbit's foot in our pockets. Some of us back on the farm were perhaps superstitious enough to hang horseshoes on the barn door or use a hundred other symbols to keep off the evil eye of failure or accident. I remember so well a common superstition of all ball players never to step on another player's mitt while it lay on the ground. To do so was certain to bring failure and defeat.

Give Your Best Efforts—Plus

This morning, I would like to give you a new good luck charm—one that is guaranteed to help you throughout your entire life, every month, every day, every hour, protecting you from all the bad-luck episodes of your life. It is guaranteed to protect your health and make you more likeable in your associations with people and more successful in your job and in your schoolwork. It will insure greater success in your daily work and bring you home to your dwelling place every evening with a sense of "well done, good and faithful servant." (Incidentally, I have to read that with a little more caution than most of you. If you change the punctuation, you can hear the Lord say, "*Well, Dunn!*")

Right now, wherever you are, picture in your mind a horizontal line. Do you see it?

Now cross it with a vertical line. Do you get the picture? Note that it is not a cross, but a plus sign. It is the sign that protected Charles Lindbergh on his perilous journey across the ocean after he had previously taken the extra pains to shut himself up in a small sedan and sit at the wheel without rest or sleep for forty-eight hours in order to study the effects upon himself of confinement, vibration, and motor lullaby.

This is the sign that brought popularity and wealth to all of the great athletes, musicians, scientists, writers, and business executives of this country who, after many efforts, finally succeeded. Scientists have said that the average person uses only about one one-hundredth of the capacity that God has given him. We know that one plus one equals two. Five plus five equals ten. But it takes the plus sign to do the trick. It gives extra hope for those of us who are discouraged, who sometimes get down in the dumps. A little added patience and determination when all seems lost may turn the advancing army of decay and start the forward march that leads to victory and our abounding triumph as a person in life, as a leader, as a student, or whatever our callings might be. If there is one person in this audience today, man or woman, who is discouraged because of failure, seemingly on his part, to obtain his ideals or some special goal and who is just about ready to give up because of continued loss and discouragement, let him remember the counsel of Elbert Hubbard, who told us that the line between failure and success is so fine that often a single extra effort is all that's needed to bring victory out of apparent defeat.

History tells us that George Washington lost nine consecutive battles, but by winning the tenth he won the war and the liberty of this great country. F. W. Woolworth made a failure of his first three stores, but the plus sign of the fourth did the trick. Henry Ford was once asked, "What would you do if you lost everything you had?"

He replied, "Give me ten years and I would build it all back again."

Each of us might well ask, "Why do I have so many problems? Why is life always such a struggle? I seem to have more bad days than good days." The plan of salvation as given by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, was intended to build our spiritual strength and character through trials and hardships. It's the sweet reward of adversity.

Some of you may find yourselves in the position of my daughter, if I might refer to her again. One night not too long ago, as we were having a family discussion and having the exchange that parents and children hopefully do, she was complaining that we were just a little too vigorous in her life with Church and other activities. "That's all we do around here," she said, "church, church, church."

I said, "Now look, honey," trying to be the teacher-father, "before you get too complaining, just remember that you are here because you wanted to be. Don't blame me. You sat in that great council and everybody here sat in that great council and voted to come here. I am just your father—here to enforce your vote."

You know what she said? "Let's put it to another vote."

But the point is that we're here! The challenge is, what are we going to do about it?

The sweet reward of adversity is illustrated in this story. As a young woman of eighteen, a pretty model found her dreams shattered by an automobile accident that confined her to a wheelchair with partially paralyzed legs. Because of the accident she learned to play the piano. Because of the accident she learned to develop a sense of humor and to find that there's a funny viewpoint to almost every subject. In time her legs regained their strength and she became an actress, gifted with a sense of humor that made her one of the outstanding comedien-nes of our time. You've heard her on the radio. You've seen her in motion pictures and particularly on television. You know that Lucille Ball

was not stopped by adversity. On the contrary, it was the plus sign that made the difference.

Randolf Eyre tells a story about the town of Enterprise, Alabama, which has raised a monument, if you can imagine, in honor of the boll weevil—the dreaded insect pest of the cotton country that once threatened to ruin this important crop. You would naturally wonder why anyone would want to erect a monument to a pest. Then you discover that the inroads and destruction of the boll weevil resulted in the planting of other crops and that the sweet potato and the peanut in particular have been of vast importance in the development of the south. The diversification of crops made the South versatile. The people learned that everything did not hinge on cotton, nor did they have to rise or fall with it. This meant a more stable and prosperous economy. In other words, an enemy did the South a good turn. The bad break became a good one. The bad luck turned to good luck. Hardships, trials, and tribulations, then, have their places in the great plan of life. So I say, whatever the battle in which we are engaged—and, no doubt, all of us have some difficulties to face—better than all the beads, seashells, buckeyes, horseshoes or other modern charms is the armor on which is painted with our own blood the plus sign. That sign means that with each crushed hope there is another hope and stronger faith. With each fall in the road, another trial. Someone has said, “I am never licked until I give up.”

The apostle Paul tells us that to him who overcomes (and it doesn't matter where he started in life's race) shall be given the crown of life. It is the plus sign, the sign that always points upward and forward, not backward, the sign that recognizes defeat as an opportunity for further effort in the future. By this sign you and I can conquer.

I have a very successful business friend in Los Angeles. I sat with him one day and asked, “What's your formula for succeeding—the criteria for success being a happy home and good

relationships with people, tremendous church service, and then business genius and other rewards?”

He said, “I can sum it up, Brother Dunn, in three words.” Let me share his formula with you. He said, “The three words are *and then some*. I discovered at an early age that most of the differences between average people and top people can be explained in these words. The top people do what is expected of them, and then some. They are thoughtful and considerate of others, and then some. They meet their obligations and responsibilities fairly and squarely, and then some. They are good friends to their friends, and then some. They can be counted on in an emergency, and then some.” So it is when we do what is assigned to us in our lives and in the Church, and then some. Then the Lord pays in full, and then some. Would you think about this formula, analyze it, and more importantly, use it—and then some?

Share the Gospel

You are getting an education. What are you going to do with it? Hopefully you'll succeed, and I'm sure you will, because that's basic to what we're discussing, but I hope and pray that you'll never reach the point where you will fail to share this most glorious of all gospels with your neighbor.

We are in a rebirth of the missionary era. I don't need to convince this audience that—once we have found ourselves, have in a sense saved ourselves and our families—we have an obligation to give the gospel to our neighbors. We have at the present time 18,600 full-time missionaries throughout the Church. President Kimball has sent out the call to send more. Now, at BYU you have a set of special problems. It's interesting. Right here on this campus we have eight thousand plus returned missionaries and many more who are preparing to go. And yet we've got you in a tiny pocket, and there are not that many to teach. We're asking now that you consider how you might prepare

not only to go on missions, but also to utilize the great strength that you have on this campus and at this great University.

Let me just review with you President Kimball's comment about missionary work. I guess you read it in your *Ensign* last month:

Today we have 18,600 missionaries. We can send more, many more. [I hope that's part of the preparation of this congregation.] I am asking for missionaries who have been carefully indoctrinated and trained through the family and the organizations of the Church. Every able, worthy man should shoulder the cross. What an army we should have teaching Christ and him crucified. We will need to make a full and prayerful study of the nations of the world which do not have the gospel at this time. [I might observe we're doing that.] I believe that the Lord is anxious to put into our hand inventions of which we laymen have hardly had a glimpse. He will open the gates and make possible the proselyting. Of that I have great faith. I believe the time has come when we must change our sights and raise our goals.

I'd like to give that statement to you as a personal challenge here. For example, in the next few weeks there will be a mass migration away from here to your various homes for Thanksgiving and Christmas. That's wonderful. You eight thousand missionaries, wherever you are, and you know who you are, could I give you a personal challenge? There are many things we could talk about in this particular field. Let me mention four. First, when you go home, even if it's just for two or three days, will you find a family and give a referral to the local stake mission or to the full-time missionaries in your town? That's not asking too much. You're already equipped. You know how to do it. Do you remember how you used to hit the General Authority when he'd come to your mission? "Oh, President," you'd say, "can you shake the people?" Many times a missionary in the field has come to me and said, "President

Dunn, when you get up to speak in the morning, remind the people. *Move* them. *Motivate* them. Why they're *dead* out here." Then the missionary comes home—and spiritually dies.

When's the last time you gave a referral? Are you part of the problem or the solution? Could I give you the challenge to go home and find a family? You're equipped to do it. I'd like to give you a second challenge. While there, and this is perfectly legitimate, volunteer to teach with the full-time and the stake missionaries two, three, or four nights. Wouldn't you like that spirit again? Get out and visit. You've got expertise and training that some of them don't have. Get back into the field. I wish we could do that on a more vigorous scale here in Provo, but you outnumber the contacts.

Third, and I say this to my missionaries as well who are sitting in this congregation, would you write to the current mission president of the mission where you served and give him a referral of the golden contact (or two or three or four) that you had who was not baptized? How many times I've found as a mission president, by a follow-up from a missionary who had a contact that our records no longer showed, that we were able to move in and be successful. Keep in contact with your mission. Let it be a glorious experience both ways.

Fourth, find that prized teaching moment—even here—and share the gospel. I know there's a young lady sitting in the congregation who's been touched by many of you. I hope she won't be embarrassed. Barbara May was baptized just this week. I attended her baptism. She came here frightened to death, worried about her acceptance as one of the few non-members amongst the great majority. You touched her, and she has entered the waters of baptism as countless scores do because of your wonderful appearance, your example, and your desire to assist other people. There are others here. There are others in the city proper that through your priesthood organizations and channels you can help contact and reach.

Now, some of you who have not had the missionary experience are a little fearful. I can see it in your faces: “You know I believe, Brother Dunn, but I don’t know how to be a missionary.” And so you kind of excuse yourself. We’re not too concerned about the method. The principle is very well stated in the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants—to warn your neighbor. Now, I don’t know how you warn him. There are as many methods as there are people doing it. I’ve shared a few here before. Maybe one in particular would be appropriate. For example, some of you are a little fearful to ask the golden questions. Maybe you’re embarrassed, not sure how someone will respond, or you don’t want to push your religion on him. Some of you would be scared to death to knock on a door. You don’t know what to do or how to do it. Others would be equally fearful of simply sitting down and writing or telephoning somebody. Find that which is conducive to your personality. I found as a mission president that, if we could get each missionary to find his own strengths and apply them, then we had something concrete.

For example, I have a hard time asking the golden questions. I’ll ask them, but my way. I travel a lot, so my neighbor is everybody out there. I carry with me in my pocket as I travel this little tube of ozium. Ozium is an air freshener. I love it. You know, if you travel from here to Arizona to give a talk before some delightful young people, you get off the plane smelling as if you’d dealt the last hand of a poker game. The kids don’t always understand. So when I get off the plane, I just spray myself and then I’m sweet and wholesome and ready to do Church work.

Well, I have learned that clearing the air on a plane is a great way to start a conversation. Stewardesses are intrigued by it. People who sit next to me want to know what I’m doing. I just say, “I’m just clearing the smoke out.” That gets me talking about the Word of Wisdom. You know, I have become so proficient with

this particular tube of ozium that I can put a cigarette out at ten feet.

I can’t resist telling you about one little experience. I was traveling back from somewhere to Salt Lake City, and it was a particularly heavily smoke-filled flight. My lungs had taken about all they could handle. I’m a fighter at heart, and I hope I do this in a Christian, Latter-day Saint way, so I took out my ozium and sprayed the culprit sitting in front of me. His air jet was fixed so that every time he would exhale I got it. I thought, “Well, it’s really self-defense rather than a missionary effort at this point.” I shot a spray over his head, and after about the third spray the mist settled on him. He got a little concerned, and I don’t blame him. He got up, turned around, and said, “What in the world are you doing?”

“I’m trying to nullify what you’re doing to me.”

“What am I doing?”

I said, “I’m sure it’s not intentional, but I seem to be getting the ill effects of your habit, and it’s not comfortable.” Then I got bold. I said, “I’m surprised that a man with your intelligence would smoke in the first place.”

He got a little defensive. “Well, the medical reports aren’t that conclusive.”

I said, “I have a medical report in my briefcase that’s very conclusive. Would you like to read it?” He said he would, and I said, “Can I sit with you?” So we got up and changed seats with a couple of people. I sat down and took out the Doctrine and Covenants, and I turned to—guess what section? I read him parts of the 89th section. He couldn’t have handled all of it. But I did read him what the Lord said about tobacco—that it was not good for man but for sick cattle. Then I read him the promise at the end. I turned to him, closed the book, and said, “Now, sir, I have just read you the truth, and you know it, don’t you?”

His head went back, and he said, “I believe I do.”

I said, "Would you be offended if I found out where you lived?"

"No." He lived in Minnesota.

I took his name and address and said, "You'd like to know a little more about this, wouldn't you?"

"Yeah."

So I sent a referral to a mission president in Minnesota. Have you ever heard of that in the Church? And I was pleased to learn some three or four weeks later that he'd been baptized.

Be a Good Example

Who is your neighbor? Oh, we could talk about countless stories like this. Here's one other, very quickly. Many of you are missionaries by your image and example. One of the great example scriptures of all time appears in the Book of Mormon. We often share this with our missionaries. Listen to what a great father tells his son: "Suffer not yourself to be led away by any vain or foolish things; suffer not the devil to lead away your heart again after those wicked harlots. Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words" (Alma 39:11). Do you get the message? You and I can go out and preach all we want, but what's the real testifier or example? The lives we live. Many have joined the Church on this campus because of your example.

Once in a while, however, we have a little problem in the department of example. Here today is a great friend of mine, Guy Davis, a member of your faculty. I knew him when he was a Methodist minister teaching at Chapman College. He has been a teacher for a number of years. One day he said, "Paul, I handle the young marrieds out at the First Methodist Church in Glendale, California. We're studying other religions right now. Would you mind coming out and giving a talk on what Mormons are and what they believe?"

I saw a chance to raise my grade so I grabbed it. I said, "Yes, sir. I'd be honored."

The appointed day came, and on a Sunday morning I drove out to Glendale. There was an impressive church. Traffic was very heavy. I drove around the block two or three times as one does in a strange area, and as I pulled around the third time, there was a fellow standing at the curb waving me down. I'd never seen him before. I wound down the window. He poked his head in and said, "Are you Mr. Dunn?"

I said yes.

He said, "Mr. Davis has asked that we look for you, and he described your car."

I said, "Well, thank you." I got out, and they parked my car. I was escorted into the building by another man. We walked down the long corridor into the basement area where the class was to be held. Before I got to the appointed room, guess what met my ears? On the organ someone was playing "Come, Come, Ye Saints." I wondered what ward it was. I started to enter the room, and I saw seated before me about 150 young married couples. They were observing a very interesting picture, a reproduction of the Salt Lake Temple and Tabernacle on Temple Square. It was hung graciously over the fireplace in their little cultural hall. They were honoring a Latter-day Saint about his religion that day and they did it very gracefully.

I was given a flowery introduction, and then I gave my little talk. We opened it up for questions and answers. Here was an intelligent group of people really wanting to know. At the end I was escorted to the back of the hall, and they passed along one at a time and shook my hand and were very courteous and generous in their comments. I got one of the finest letters I have ever received from the officers of the group. For years, and still now, every time I hear the word "Methodist" I feel a warm glow in my heart because of an experience I had as a visitor.

It so happened a few weeks later that one of the bishops in southern California called me

and said, "I understand you're a student down at Chapman."

"Yes, sir."

He said, "Do you suppose you could get one of those other ministers to come and talk about other religions in our special interests group?" I had one in mind—to pay him back.

I invited my friend to come and speak in my ward. We appointed a time. He had to cancel some other very important appointments. In other churches, as you know, the clergy is paid. We don't think of that, oftentimes. He canceled a presentation he was going to give that week for about one hundred dollars in order to come and speak for punch and cookies at a Mormon function.

We arranged for it, and I picked him up on the appointed night. We drove over to the building where the class was to be held. I got there about fifteen minutes beforehand. Lo and behold, the church was dark. Sound familiar? I wondered if I had the right building. I said, "Wait a minute," and explained that one of the great Mormon principles of lay leadership is that we move by the Spirit. About twenty-five minutes after the hour, the spirits started to move. Out of the shrubs and the bushes came Latter-day Saints everywhere. The lights went on, and people were starting to flock. I went in with my guest, our guest, and stood in the foyer. Latter-day Saint after Latter-day Saint, not meaning to, passed us. Not one came over to see who we were. I tried to give Mr. Davis another little sermon on Latter-day Saint philosophy. Finally it was time to start, and we were about fifteen minutes late. We moved into the Relief Society room. Somebody picked up

a songbook and said, "What song should we sing?" In a very informal way the meeting got underway. Then my friend gave one of the finest lectures on the New Testament I've ever heard. He was very sensitive to a Mormon audience and tried not to say anything that would offend. Then we opened it up for questions, and I don't dare repeat the rest. I'm sure what happened kept my friend from being associated with this Church sooner than he could have. I don't know. I haven't analyzed it with him. But I often have wondered—if I were a Presbyterian or a Catholic or a Baptist or an atheist, having experienced those two things—which church would I join? You see, our conduct, our image, our example, brothers and sisters, are great, great missionary tools.

I challenge all of you to reanalyze your lives, to find out just exactly where you fit in. Would you take the challenge today to give all that you have to the building of the kingdom as you have come to find it and to know it in your own heart? God bless you. You're a great congregation. You're a special group. I want you to know that I know God lives and that Jesus is the Christ. Just recently I've been in the valley of death, and I know just a little bit more about what we're here trying to study and learn about. I know the feeling of having a prophet place his hands upon my head. I know this is the true church. I know the presence of the Savior. To those of you who do not yet know, listen with your spirits, for I testify he lives. This really is his church. May you and I recommit this hour to go teach Jesus Christ and him crucified I pray in the sacred name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.