

Seek and Ye Shall Find

PAUL H. DUNN

Good morning. It is a delight to stand in your company and feel of your marvelous spirit again. I appreciate President Holland's thoughtful obituary. I couldn't help but think of an experience I had some years ago in traveling through an old Boston cemetery. Back in those days they used to place on tombstones little inscriptions call epitaphs. I remember that, as I walked through the cemetery, I was greeted by one headstone that simply said, "Here lies John Yeast; pardon me for not rising." Not far away was one with this inscription: "Here lies my beloved husband, Tom Morgan. May he rest in peace 'til we meet again." There is another not far away like unto it: "I placed my wife beneath this stone for her repose and for my own." I always enjoyed this one: "Here lies Solomon Pease. Pease is not here, only the pod. Pease shelled out and went home to God." Way to the back of the cemetery is one that makes you think: "Here lies John Koncupott, may God be as good to him as he would be if he were God and God were John Koncupott." In Arizona there is a tombstone that reads, "Here lies Les Moore, he took four slugs from a forty-four, no less, no more." I think one of the classic tombstones of all time is the one that simply read, "I told you I was sick."

Well, I come as your friend, and I am delighted to be here. I always speak here with some fear and trembling because Latter-day Saints have a habit of keeping you very humble.

A few weeks ago I attended stake conference (I won't mention where because you are all related to somebody), and while I was there, the stake president wondered if I would make a stop in with the Primary. I am always delighted to do that. Children are delightful, as you know; they don't really care who you are. As we made our way back to the Primary conference, startling some of the workers as we entered, I struggled to get into one of those little chairs. The Primary coordinator called the meeting to order. We sang some Primary songs that you are all familiar with; then she invited a little four-year-old girl to come up to pray. I'll never forget that prayer. She kind of wobbled up as little girls do, and the Primary worker turned her around and placed her hands on

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the little girl's shoulders and whispered to her, "Would you like me to help you pray?"

The little girl said, "I can do it myself." She folded her little arms, and this is what she said: "Dear Heavenly Father, please bless President Kimball and all of his impossibles." The stake president leaned over to me and said, "I guess we know where you fit." Well, thank God for little children.

As I drove down here this morning, little patches of fog occurred, and I couldn't help but think, as I came onto this campus, how grateful I am for the light and the knowledge and the direction we have. It doesn't matter what the fog of life is; here you learn to perceive the truth and understand it.

I couldn't help but think of one other little experience. Maybe you know the story about the Navy commander who sailed his ship out into the harbor one foggy morning. As they were heading out to sea, his signalman came and said, "We're on collision course with a light."

The commander then directed the signalman to send the following message, "On collision course. Move ten degrees right."

The signal came back, "Confirmed. We are on collision course. You move ten degrees right."

The Navy commander with his rank was a little incensed. He sent back this message, "I am a full Navy commander. You move ten degrees right."

The message came back, "I am a signalman second class. You move ten degrees right."

Finally the commander sent this message, "I am in a battleship. You move ten degrees right."

The signal came back that said, "I am in a lighthouse. You move ten degrees right." I have always felt that this great university is truly a lighthouse unto the world, and I salute you and compliment you here.

I have an opportunity as an officer of the Church to travel much of the world. It is

exciting, it is interesting, and it is challenging. Quite frequently, as we go to and fro—and once in a while even in the ranks of our own people—you will hear the comment, "Boy, the world is sure going to the dogs." Think about that for a minute. I couldn't help but pull from my notebook this little statement by an unknown author:

*My granddad, viewing this earth's worn cogs,
Said, "Things are going to the dogs."*

His granddad in his house of logs

Said, "Things are certainly going to the dogs."

His granddad in the Flemish bogs

Said, "Things are going to the dogs."

His granddad in the old skin togs

Said, "Things are going to the dogs."

There is one thing that I have to state:

The dogs have had a good long wait.

A Wonderful Time to Be Alive

I am here as one of the witnesses of our Lord to declare that that time has not yet arrived. I think that you have a great future. I want to assure you that, with all the ups and downs in the world today, what you are doing here in preparation for life is essential. I am one of your great fans who is cheering you on as you make necessary and marvelous preparation.

I have often thought, as I have watched young people like you everywhere in the Church, what a wonderful time it is to be alive and to know what an impact you are having. Can you think of a better time to be alive? If you could select a particular generation right now, if you had the choice to choose the time in which you would be a young adult or a more mature adult, which era would you choose? Think about it. Would you go back to some of the generations that we represent? I was a teenager and a young adult in the forties. Would that thrill you? You think the world looks bleak today? You should have seen it in the forties.

I want to talk to you a little bit about that, not so much about the forties but about what you are, where you are, and the future that lies before you. Quite often General Authorities of the Church are sought after for counsel and direction by young people everywhere, both in and out of the Church. If you and I had an opportunity for a few moments to sit one-on-one—and I would like that, I really would—here are four things I think I might share with you as you contemplate your present circumstances and think about the future.

Heavenly Offspring

The first point I think I might want to discuss with you would be the fact that you are literally an offspring of heavenly parents—you really are!—and you came into mortality to succeed. There isn't a failure among you. Failure is simply an outgrowth of lack of confidence or understanding. I am here as your friend to testify that you have brilliance and divinity within you. It is being tested. It always has been and always will be. Could I just suggest that, as you plan for the future, you consider very seriously what the Lord has already instilled in you? A lot of young people say, "I'm not sure what I want to do in life." This is, of course, a time to ponder that and experiment a little bit. The Lord has already told you in part.

Let me ask you a few questions. What are your desires? What are you good at? What comes usually quite easily for you? What do you enjoy doing most? What spiritual gifts do you have? Tonight sometime before you retire, would you do yourself a little favor? Read and reread section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It won't take you long, and there you will gain tremendous insight as to the point I am trying to make. For the Lord has blessed you indeed, spiritually, with gifts that are unique and different from those of any other person in the world. You came with blessings earned and talents developed before you entered mortality.

If we had a classroom arrangement this morning and I asked each one of you to name ten things that you would like to accomplish by your fortieth birthday (I know forty seems like time and all eternity away, but it really isn't), I would be intensely interested in what you would list. In that list you would be telling me the things that you like to do and would be good at. Quite frequently parents will have a tendency to train up a child to take over his or her profession. That may be well and good, and maybe that is what you would like to do, but ponder carefully what unique talents and abilities you have.

I grew up as a little boy wanting to be an athlete. That was all I could think about. I ate, drank, and slept it. I had a wonderful father who was a businessman. He was in the grocery business. By the time I was a teenager, he had developed a little chain of grocery stores, and he was training his boys to have employment, to have a skill to offer to the world. My older brother didn't want it. He wanted to be a teacher. My younger brother wanted to be a doctor. I wanted to be an athlete. I had a father who was wise enough not to pressure or force each boy into a given slot. He said, "I have developed these stores so that you would always have a skill. If you don't want it, I will sell all the stores." And he did, that quick. Each boy went on to pursue his own profession, but we have been trained in something we can fall back on.

What a wonderful parent to think of the unique needs of his sons rather than merely fulfilling his desire! Ponder these things; seek the counsel of your parents, wise bishops, leaders, and friends in whom you have trust.

Patriarchal Blessings

Point number two, if you don't already have it, secure your patriarchal blessing. Do it with spiritual orientation and understanding and preparation. I always like to think of a patriarchal blessing as your personal scripture

because the Lord is revealing to you and me those things that are potentially good and great in our lives, and it can all be fulfilled if we meet certain qualifications and conditions.

At the risk of embarrassing me a little bit, could I tell you a personal story? When I was a young teenager wanting to pursue the athletic field, I was moving along with relative ease with some accomplishment. The time came when I signed a professional contract. Unfortunately world conditions were much more serious than they are now. The rest of the world was engaged in a conflict, and then the enemy struck us. It became necessary in that year to lower the draft age to eighteen. I turned eighteen the very month they lowered it. Now how is that for timing? They had a big drawing in Washington to see which number would go first. Do I have to tell you whose number they picked? And instead of going into the field of my great desire, I ended up going into the military. I wasn't a bad boy, but I left a little bit to be desired, I'm sure, in the hearts of my parents.

My dad, upon learning that I was to be in that first eighteen-year-old draft, called me to his side and said, "Paul, you haven't yet received your patriarchal blessing. Would you do that?" He gave me a little spiritual preparation, and, being typical at that age, I said, "Yeah, I'll go do it." I went and got the necessary recommends and on the appointed day made preparation to go down to have the blessing. My dad made one other suggestion. He said, "Maybe you would like to fast and pray about it before you go." Well, to fast one meal in those days for me was monumental, and somehow I got through one meal, prayed a little bit about certain concerns I had regarding the future, and then drove down to the stake center.

Old Brother George Wride, Los Angeles stake patriarch, was there to receive me. He was in his eighties, white haired, and kind of wobbly. Now, do you know what an eighty-

year-old man looks like to a teenager? I thought I was being blessed by Abraham. He came out of the office to get my recommend, and he wasn't too surefooted. I thought, "Boy, this will be something."

He took my recommend, ushered me into the office, had me sit down, and pulled up a chair so that we were pretty close to each other. I think he had one foot in that office and the other foot in heaven. Then he gave me a very thorough interview, and after about twenty minutes (I'd never seen him before except at a distance. I'm not sure he knew who I was other than another teenage boy coming through the ranks), he stood up, came around behind me, and put his hands on my head. He called me by name, declared my lineage, and then he paused. I'll never forget that. He said, "Now concerning the future. Thou shalt experience combat. Angels shall intercede in thy behalf and protect thee all the days of thy life, and thou shalt live to testify to all the nations of the world that Jesus is the Christ." He continued to tell me some very personal things, and I ask that you pardon me for not sharing them here. All of it was in concert with the desires of my heart that I had expressed as I knelt as a teenager to pray to God.

Well, I went home after that, and even I was impressed. You know how parents are, kind of anxious about what happens to their kids. When I walked in the door, my dad said, "What did he say? What did he say?" I said, "I don't know; he had angels flying around." Two weeks later, my blessing came in the mail. My father, as a young man just married, taught at this institution when it was at the lower campus. He taught typing, shorthand, and penmanship. At age 64, the year he died, he could type 125 words per minute on a conventional typewriter. The blessing came in the mail, and unbeknownst to me he had gone out and purchased a waterproof wallet. He sat down at the typewriter: "Tap, tap, tap," and there was a new copy of my blessing. He put it in the

wallet, handed it to me, and said, "Now, take it with you and read it."

I'm embarrassed to tell you. I went off to war, and, during ten months of training in the United States, I didn't even open it. Then I was shipped to Hawaii and had three months of jungle training. Then one morning at 4:00 a.m. they came unannounced to load us up on troopships, and out we went with a great mass of ships to a destination we didn't know at that time.

Three weeks later we were out in a harbor where the Navy was pounding the beach. You've seen enough movies on that to understand a little about it. The night before the invasion we were issued live ammunition. Now all of a sudden the previous year's training came into focus. We didn't go below the deck that night because we were all a little frightened, wondering what would happen. I had just had my nineteenth birthday. The next morning I was assigned to the seventh boat team, the seventh wave, as we called it. We started to load into the landing craft at about 0500, and 0600 in the morning was to be H-hour on that D-day.

I don't know if you understand the challenges of getting into one of those boats. It was interesting. The deck where we were standing was four stories above the water, and the water that morning was pretty rough. We were experiencing forty-foot swells. We were trying to get into what was called a landing craft vehicle—personnel (LCVP) that held about thirty infantrymen. The boat was out about thirty or forty feet from the ship itself, rising and dropping about thirty or forty feet. When you came down on one of those cargo nets, you had to drop precisely as the boat came up because you didn't want to miss (keep in mind each of us had a twenty-pound pack, a ten-pound rifle, a five-pound helmet, and thirty-five pounds of ammunition). If you missed the boat, the harbor was about four hundred feet deep, and you wouldn't come up very readily. And so it made

a whole lot of difference in how we got down into one of those crafts on a cargo net, with all those characters above us stepping on our fingers as we went down.

From the time we arrived in the harbor until just a few seconds before H-hour, the Navy was pounding the beach. The noise from the shells was so loud we couldn't even hear each other talk when we were sitting next to one another. It was deafening. Pretty soon we started to click off our watches, five minutes before H-hour, four, three, two, one. Exactly as the second hand passed the mark, the Navy just ceased firing. There was total silence out there, thousands of men and nobody making a sound.

Then a flare goes off, and the first boat team starts in. They have about 2,000 yards to shore. Well, the first boat team goes, and when they are about 1,200 yards from shore the whole beach opens up. I don't know how anybody could stay alive. And one craft after the other is hit, scattering American soldiers in the water. The second flare goes off, and the next boat goes in. The same thing happens to the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth. Nobody's getting ashore. It makes you ponder and wonder.

Now it comes time for the seventh wave, and that is mine. The flare goes off, and in goes the boat team. It is kind of eerie sitting there watching that boat go up and down, and you can see the palm trees getting a little bigger. Your heart is pounding, and all of a sudden the whole shoreline opens up, zeroing in on you. Now it is H-hour plus one, and the tide is starting to come out. It exposes a large coral reef, and our LCVP can't get over it. The boat sticks on the coral reef.

The Navy crew gets excited. They drop the front of the boat and say, "Get out of here; you're drawing fire!" We jump into the water. The water is chest high. You have to hold your rifle over your head. If the muzzle drops in the water, the salt water will make it blow up on you when you fire. Did you ever try to run in

water up to your chest when you were loaded down? You don't move very fast. And the enemy starts to pick you up. You are pushing aside with the butt of your rifle the dead and wounded bodies of the friends and associates you have been training with. The coral is so sharp it cuts the boots off your feet, and your feet are starting to bleed like mincemeat. You are trying to get ashore.

I was one of the first ashore that morning, and I dug my first foxhole with my fingernails. Just as I crawled into that mucky hole an ambu gun opened up. It shoots about seven hundred rounds a minute. A round went down my right arm and took off my identification bracelet. I rolled over and started to talk to my Heavenly Father, and he answered me. I have never been the same since.

As we secured the beach that morning, I reached into my pocket and took out that wallet my father had prepared and read what the Lord had said, "Angels shall intercede in thy behalf and protect thee all the days of thy life, and thou shalt live many years and testify to the people of the world that Jesus is the Christ." Imagine that being given to a nineteen-year-old out there!

Get your blessings, young people. Ponder them. They are not all perfectly clear. It is exciting for me now, at this stage of my life, to read into mine what the Lord said when I was a teenager and to see the fulfillment of those promises and blessings.

Take the time to couple the desires, the interests, the blessings, and the talents you have with what the Lord is telling you in your blessing. They go hand in hand—they really do.

Seek Counsel

The third point I think I would want to talk to you about is—and I wish we had a lot of time to talk about it—seek the counsel and advice of those you respect and honor and love and appreciate, whatever your goal or aspirations are in life. I think it is one of the most

untapped resources available to young people in the world today.

I'm not here to suggest for a minute what you ought to do. I don't know. But I feel that we could talk and sift a little bit and get some kind of meaningful direction. Maybe you want to be a doctor, a lawyer, an architect, a designer. Who knows? You do, and the Lord does. I would certainly seek out the counsel of those, both members and nonmembers, who could give me the kind of direction and understanding I needed.

When I attended the university some years ago, I noticed the national pastime before me: young people shifting their majors. Good grief! The average college student when I was in college shifted his major four times in four years. Does that tell you anything? Why not take the time before you get here to see honestly what direction you want to go? How many times I have sat in counsel with a man who went into engineering when he really wanted to be a doctor? Or how about a man who thought he wanted to be a ballplayer until the pro sport became a part of his life and wasn't what he thought it was? Now is the time to sift and seek. Maybe what you have in mind is exactly what you ought to do. I don't know.

Occasionally I represent the Church in kind of a fun assignment. I play in a lot of golf tournaments as kind of a public relations thing. I was down in North Carolina a few years ago playing in a tournament with some of the prestigious athletes of our country, and I happened to be for a time with a fellow by the name of Willie Mays, former outfielder for the San Francisco and New York Giants, a Hall of Famer, a great, great guy. I pitched against Willie Mays as he broke into baseball and I was passing from the scene. If you ever want a lesson in humility, he can teach it. We were talking about old times and how the game had changed. Keep in mind that he was one of the greatest right-handed hitters the game has ever produced. I said to him while we were conversing, "Willie, may I ask you a question?"

He said, "Certainly."

I said, "How many Little Leaguers, Babe Ruthers, college, and high school athletes wanting to be ballplayers have come to you personally, have sought you out personally, for what counsel and advice you would give on the art of hitting?"

He answered, "Nobody."

And I sat there and said, "What!"

Here is one of the greatest athletes of all time. You have fifteen million boys trying to break into the major leagues where there are only eight hundred openings, and they haven't even sought the counsel of one of the greatest authorities in the world! Can you imagine how many young men in this Church have had the desire to fulfill a full-time mission and probably never wrote to LeGrand Richards while he was alive to ask, "Just tell me three things, sir, I ought to do to prepare for that great experience"?

Can you imagine living in the day of Shakespeare, wanting to be a writer and not going to get his counsel? Can you imagine wanting to be an artist and living down the street from Michelangelo and not inquiring? Can you imagine these things? I've noticed that truly great people always have time for you. Little people never do. I don't mean little in stature, I mean little in character and desire to help. Seek the wise counsel and advice in your field, both spiritual and academic, that can help you.

Seek Heavenly Father

Fourth, and finally, and probably the most important, cultivate a personal relationship with your Heavenly Father. Seek him in counsel and direction, confirm and verify. Our Heavenly Father has sent you and me here to learn basically how one day to be like him. That is primarily the purpose of mortality. God

isn't going to do all our homework for us; that is why we are here. A lot of young people come and say, "Well, Brother Dunn, I pray, and I don't get any answers."

Then my question is, "How do you pray?" Maybe you are the way my little girls were some years ago. They would want me to do their homework while they watched TV, and a wise father would never do that. He probably would say something like this, "You go study it out. You go do the problems and bring it to me, and I'll tell you if it is right or not." That is paraphrasing, I guess, the ninth section of the Doctrine and Covenants.

I don't know who you ought to marry. There are probably ten or fifteen men out there, ladies, who could qualify, or, men, the same for you with the ladies. But the Lord expects you to do a little homework, dating, investigating, and then bring personalities to him.

I don't know what you ought to do in this life. I'm not sure the Lord would care. It could be any one of ten things, but he expects you and me to think about it and ponder it and study it and experiment with it. Develop a personal relationship with your Heavenly Father and confirm it with him.

Well, you are marvelous. What a delight to spend some time in your company! I want you to know, as you face the future, that the Lord hasn't left you alone. There are those of us who are in your midst who really know these things to be true. God bless you young people. I love you, I respect you, and I honor you. I pray for your success as you project now into the future. May you know I know these things to be true as I bear witness of our Heavenly Father that he lives, and Jesus the Christ, my Savior, for whom I thank God. I say these things humbly and gratefully as I bear my witness now, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.