

# *Becoming You*

RICHARD C. EDGLEY

**I**t is a privilege for me to speak with you this evening. My delight stems not just from who you are but, maybe even more important, from who you may become.

In 1955, after my first year of college, a friend and I spent the summer working at the newly constructed Jackson Lake Lodge in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. We arrived at the lodge in time to help prepare for its grand opening. As the date of the anticipated celebration approached, we learned two important things about the grand opening. First, many dignitaries, prominent businessmen, civic leaders, and western governors would be there. Most important, however, we learned that President David O. McKay would be present. The second thing we learned was that there was going to be a gigantic cocktail party between 2:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon, where a lot of alcohol would be served.

Having already completed one year of college and thus being reasonably bright, we concluded that President McKay was going to have some free time that afternoon, and we decided we would help relieve his boredom. Having wrangled President McKay's room number from one of the young men who worked at the front desk, we timidly made our way to his room and knocked on the door. In a few moments we were mesmerized as we stood in the presence of the

tall, stately, white-haired prophet of the Lord. We were in his presence, and we felt the spirit that radiated from his very being. While we stood in awe, however, it was apparent that we had awakened him from a nap and that his dear wife was still sleeping.

In spite of our inappropriate intrusion into a very scarce moment of rest and solitude, he was ever so gracious and showed a sincere interest in us. After a few moments of conversation, he returned to his room and we began down the hallway, joyful and in awe, for we had just shaken the hand of God's living prophet. We had only taken a few steps when his door opened again. President McKay stepped out into the hallway and called out, "Boys, remember who you are."

Now that was not the first time I had heard the phrase "Remember who you are." I had heard it many times from my Young Men leaders and my bishop. I heard it from my parents almost every time I went out on a date. I even

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heard it from my football and basketball coaches. In fact, I had heard it so often that I was beginning to become irritated with the constant reminder. But this time it was different. It was coming from a prophet of God: “Boys, remember who you are.”

And importantly implicit in President McKay’s statement is the phrase “Remember what you can become.” This brings me to what I consider to be perhaps the most fundamental doctrine of the gospel. It is a doctrine so fundamental that even the Atonement of our beloved Savior is based upon it. It is a doctrine that is the cornerstone of what Alma called the “plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). It is a doctrine of hope. It is a doctrine of perspective. It is a doctrine of faith. It is a doctrine of vision. And it is a doctrine of strength and fortification.

When the Lord had a very important work for Moses, the Lord began to orient and prepare him for his responsibilities. We read in the first chapter of Moses that the Lord talked to Moses face to face. Thus began the important teaching about who God was and who Moses was. God declared to Moses, “Behold, thou art my son” (Moses 1:4). During this orientation God showed Moses the vastness and wonders of His creations. And then He referred to Moses as His son three different times and then explained that Moses was created “in the similitude of mine Only Begotten; and mine Only Begotten is and shall be the Savior, for he is full of grace and truth” (Moses 1:6). Reinforcing this understanding, Moses’ spiritual eyes had been opened, and he saw God, his Father, in whose image he was created. With this experience Moses had his eyes opened, and his vision of his worth and capabilities expanded. And with this new knowledge Moses was prepared for the work God had for him.

I don’t believe this account in the Pearl of Great Price was recorded in such detail for the sole purpose of filling a couple of pages of scripture or to merely display the vastness of God’s creations. There is significant purpose in these passages—the power of just knowing

and remembering who you are and what your divine potential is.

Benjamin Franklin, an early American statesman and signer of the Declaration of Independence, gave meaning to this understanding and knowledge when he wrote the following:

*We stand at the crossroads,  
each minute,  
each hour,  
each day,  
making choices.*

*We choose  
the thoughts  
we allow ourselves to think,  
the passions  
we allow ourselves to feel,  
and the actions  
we allow ourselves to perform.*

*Each choice  
is made in the context  
of whatever value system  
we’ve selected  
to govern our lives.*

*In selecting that value system,  
we are,  
in a very real way,  
making the most important choice  
we will ever make.*

*Those who believe there is one God  
who made all things  
and who governs the world by his Providence  
will make many choices different  
from those who do not.*

*Those who hold in reverence  
that being who gave them life  
and worship Him through  
adoration,  
prayer,*

*and thanksgiving  
will make many choices different  
from those who do not.*

*Those who believe  
that mankind are all of a family  
and that the most acceptable  
service of God  
is doing good to man  
will make many choices different  
from those who do not.*

*Those who believe  
in a future state  
in which  
all that is wrong here  
will be made right  
will make many choices different  
from those who do not.*

*Those who subscribe  
to the morals of Jesus  
will make many choices different  
from those who do not.*

*Since the foundation of all happiness  
is thinking rightly,  
and since correct action  
is dependent on correct opinion,  
we cannot be too careful  
in choosing the value system  
we allow to govern  
our thoughts and actions.*

*And to know that God governs  
in the affairs of men,  
that he hears and answers prayers,  
and that he is a rewarder of them that  
diligently seek Him,  
is indeed,  
a powerful regulator  
of human conduct.*

[Benjamin Franklin's *The Art of Virtue: His  
Formula for Successful Living*, ed. George L.

Rogers, 3rd ed. (Eden Prairie, Minnesota:  
Acorn Publishing, 1996), 88–90]

I would add to Benjamin Franklin's statement by saying that those who believe they are sons and daughters of God, created in the image and likeness of the Only Begotten Son, "will make many choices different from those who do not." And why is this so important to us? Because ultimately we become the product of the myriad choices we are constantly making: choices that may seem quite inconsequential today but that may have an enormous impact on what measure of being we become; choices that sometimes isolate us from our peers on certain matters of principle; choices that are popular and choices that are unpopular; choices that are seen by others and choices that are known by only you and God.

And thus our value system becomes our anchor and mooring for life's greatest decisions, and our knowledge of who we are and what our relationship is with God becomes the basis for the value system upon which all these choices are based. Yes, those who know, who really know unequivocally that they are a son or daughter of God, created in the image and likeness of the Only Begotten, will make many choices different from those who do not. In the final analysis, our very salvation is simply a matter of our cumulative choices. Living righteously is based on an understanding of our relationship with the Almighty, an understanding of how we fit into the grand scheme of things. A constant reminder to ourselves that our value system is based upon being sons and daughters of God provides both the perspective and the strength to make correct choices. And with this knowledge, the choices flow.

In Ecclesiastes we read

*To every thing there is a season, and a time to  
every purpose under the heaven:*

*A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.* [Ecclesiastes 3:1–2]

As young adults you have arrived at a very special time in your life. You are in the planting season as you are in the process of making many of life's most important choices—choices of education, profession, whom and how you will marry, what kind of parent and eternal companion you will be. This planting season is compressed into a very few years, years of great consequence. Thus yours is a season of planting for a future that will bring an abundant harvest at the “time to pluck up that which is planted.” Indeed, you stand at a crossroad of eternal consequences. With this in mind, let me suggest three choices I believe are appropriate and critical to your future—three choices of planting for a future harvest:

1. Choose to be a righteous example.
2. Choose to become self-reliant.
3. Choose a celestial marriage and eternal family.

### **Choose to Be a Righteous Example**

Lehi taught:

*Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh. . . . They are 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; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.* [2 Nephi 2:27]

At the time of our baptism we made important choices. We chose to become a member of Christ's true church. We chose to take upon ourselves the name of Christ, and in so doing we chose to be an example to the entire world. This is a responsibility we cannot pass by lightly. The Savior reminded us

of our responsibility to be an example. Speaking to us through the holy scriptures, He declared:

*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

*Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* [Matthew 5:14–16]

On my first day in graduate school I was in an economics class where the professor asked each of us to introduce ourselves and tell what university we had graduated from. When I explained I had graduated from Brigham Young University, the professor interrupted the discussion and said, “It's nice to have another student from BYU.” Then he inquired, “Do you know so and so?” I knew of him. Then he asked if I knew another BYU graduate, whom I did know. After naming several others, he concluded by saying, “They were great BYU students—men of character. It is nice to have you among us.”

I was frankly somewhat embarrassed and uncomfortable with the attention. The professor was crediting the students' favorable traits to being graduates of BYU when in reality they were LDS students living gospel standards. And what he failed to understand is that we have LDS men and women of this caliber in universities all over the world. Nevertheless, candles had been lit, lights had been shown. Those BYU graduates had set a standard, and I was a little anxious about whether I would be able to maintain it. But I was determined to try to light another candle.

Alma refers to this light as “countenance” (see Alma 5:14). Each of us is responsible for the countenance that shines from within us. The personal light that radiates from our faces is either brightened or dimmed by the righteous or the unrighteous choices we make. When the

Church was negotiating with the Jewish officials regarding the purchase of land and the construction of the Jerusalem Center, one of the conditions for approval was that we would not proselytize citizens in Israel. Reportedly, after we had pledged acceptance of that condition, someone in Israel said to a member about the agreement, “But how do you stop the shining in your eyes? Every one of you has it” (in Cheryl Brown, “Bright Minds and Broken Hearts,” *Brigham Young University 1996–97 Speeches* [Provo: BYU, 1997], 172). What a tremendous compliment to our students and members who are lighting candles—lights shining forth as righteous examples.

Every time we partake of the sacrament we remind ourselves of the important covenants made at baptism and we renew the covenant to take upon us the name of Christ. This is a responsibility, attached with all the blessings that a loving Father can give.

You as young adults have many pressures put upon you. Satan is using all his cunning devices and supporting forces to influence your choices toward iniquity. His objective is to blow out candles, to extinguish the light. We are not at all surprised by this. It was explained as part of the great plan, and we have subsequently had very specific warnings regarding Satan’s power, influence, and determination. Nephi prophesied more than 2,500 ago of the trials and turbulence that you would face. You all know the scripture. It is found in the 28th chapter of 2 Nephi:

*For behold, at that day shall he [Satan] rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.*

*And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. [2 Nephi 28:20–21]*

I believe this scripture is true. I believe the time is now. And I believe the target is you. For the most part, Satan has made great strides in establishing and selling his value system, which is based upon the son of man, not the Son of God: “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” (2 Nephi 28:7) and “There is no hell” (2 Nephi 28:22). His is a value system based upon selfishness, self-indulgence, and immediate gratification. Thus we see devastating decisions constantly being made by those of your age. We see cultures infested with drugs, sex, alcohol, pornography, laziness, and many other spiritually devastating practices. But that does not have to be you.

President Gordon B. Hinckley has warned us and pleaded with us:

*I wish to say in the strongest language of which I am capable, stay away from moral iniquity. You know what is right and wrong. You cannot use ignorance as an excuse for unacceptable behavior. . . .*

*I beg of you, my dear young friends, to avoid such behavior. It will not be easy. It will require self-discipline. The forces you confront are powerful and inviting. They are the forces of a clever adversary. You need the strength that comes of prayer. [Gordon B. Hinckley, “To Men of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, November 2002, 58–59]*

We don’t have to fall into Satan’s trap of immorality, sexual experimentation, inappropriate music, and you know the rest. Those of us who know we are sons and daughters of God, created in the image and likeness of His Only Begotten, will face temptation differently than those who do not. Those of us who know we are sons and daughters of God will stand for principle and on a higher moral plane than those who do not. Those of us who know we are sons and daughters of God will have light that shines differently than those who do not. We will have light that cannot be hid.

It was Joshua who said, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Joshua 24:15). It is our day and our choice as to whom we will serve.

Some years ago a Canadian convert family was driven from their home because of persecution. As they left their home for a more hospitable place to live, they rewrote the words to a hymn with these words:

*Dare to be a Mormon;*

*Dare to stand alone;*

*Dare to have a purpose firm;*

*Dare to make it known!*

[In Mark E. Petersen, *CR*, April 1952, 104]

Amanda Wallace, a young high school freshman in Gilmer, Texas, wrote in her journal after severe and steady persecution from her high school peers for standing up for her religion:

*I know through the trials I've faced and have overcome that the blessings do follow eventually. . . . I love my Savior and know firsthand that anything that doesn't kill me will make me stronger and help me love Him more, and I await the day that I am in His presence again that He might say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."*

When the Prophet Joseph Smith was in the midst of translating the Book of Mormon, Martin Harris' wife was skeptical. She had an interest in the work since Martin was going to fund the printing of the first edition with a mortgage on their home. To satisfy her questioning faith, Martin asked Joseph if she could just see not the plates themselves but a portion of the manuscript translated from the plates.

You know the story. The Prophet inquired of the Lord about this request, and the Lord said no. Continued pressure by Martin's wife resulted in a second inquiry of the Lord; the same answer followed. But after continued nagging, a third inquiry was made, and Martin was given the manuscript containing the translation of a portion of the large plates. The man-

uscripts were somehow unexplainably lost while in the possession of the Harrises. With this, the Lord chastised the Prophet, and because of his continued persistence that resulted in the loss of the manuscript, our Father in Heaven temporarily withheld Joseph's power to translate the plates. The Lord told Joseph that Joseph “feared man more than God” (D&C 3:7). We have nothing to fear when we stand for righteousness and principle. We have nothing to fear when we pay our homage to God rather than to man.

Be willing to stand for principle. Be willing to be an example of righteousness. Light a candle. Let it glow. It won't hurt you, I promise.

### **Choose to Become Self-Reliant**

The second choice I would encourage for you is self-reliance. Self-reliance should be the objective of every member of the Church. The proclamation of the family states: “Fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life.” On the other hand, “Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children” (“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102).

Self-reliance is a basic condition of self-esteem. It affects our confidence and our ability to achieve. It is difficult for us to feel good about ourselves and to feel our divine nature when we inappropriately rely on others to sustain and support us for our temporal or spiritual needs. Self-reliance is important for families to be stable and happy and to have the ability to serve the Lord, the family, and the community. Self-reliance is a blessing we should all strive to give to our children. It is a principle that our children should have ingrained within them from seeing our own example and hard work. Our best efforts should be to remove the uncertainty and fear about our temporal well-being and be prepared for the often turbulent and unknown future. It is difficult and often impossible for members who are constantly

struggling financially to hold positions of service in the Church or in the community.

This is the time in your life for the planting of self-reliance seeds. It is a time to make the required sacrifices for the future harvest. The importance of this time of preparedness is highlighted in President Hinckley's establishment of the Perpetual Education Fund. This incentive is not only a means to help needy young people finance their education and desired schooling and training, it is a clear and persuasive signal to all to establish temporal preparedness as an important priority and to make the necessary sacrifices now.

I recognize that many of you have already completed your education or are now attending school, special training programs, vocational training, or apprenticeships to provide for your future. To you I say, "Stay the course." The harvest will be worth the sacrifice. To all I encourage you to do what it takes to become self-reliant. And now is the season of planting.

One of the most significant obstacles in achieving self-reliance is the accumulation of unnecessary debt. As young adults, many of you are out on your own for the first time in your lives. You are in the process of accumulating "stuff," most of which you consider essential but most of which is not really that important for now. Lending institutions make it easy and enticing to trade your future security and well-being for the gratification of now.

The most prevalent and most expensive debt is the easiest to acquire—credit card debt. Financial institutions often offer unsolicited lines of credit at seemingly low interest rates, but the interest rates are soon adjusted to the prevailing, onerous rates of 18 to 20 percent. It is not unusual to see young people with \$15,000 to \$20,000 of credit card debt at these terribly burdensome rates. The debt payment is often so high that the only way they can provide for themselves or their families is to take on more debt. Thus begins the vicious cycle of lifetime bondage to creditors.

It is true that some debt may be necessary and legitimate. Funds expended for education and professional improvement may be justified as investments in your future. Such expenditures may be the only avenue to a secure future—thus the purpose of the low-interest Perpetual Education Fund. Most people have to take a mortgage, at relatively low interest, to acquire a home. But in all instances prudence and conservatism should be used. Many of the things we feel we need now could be scaled down or delayed until we can pay for them. Eliminating the interest can greatly reduce the cost. In many instances the interest paid far exceeds the original cost of the purchase. Someone once said: "Those who understand interest collect it. Those who don't, pay it."

President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., once cautioned, "Avoid debt as we would avoid a plague" (in *CR*, April 1937, 26). His counsel remains appropriate for us today.

The unnecessary debt being carried by so many has been such a concern to the First Presidency that President Gordon B. Hinckley has warned us several times in the last few years. In April 1998 he stated:

*Be modest in your wants. You do not need a big home with a big mortgage as you begin your lives together. You can and should avoid overwhelming debt. There is nothing that will cause greater tensions in marriage than grinding debt, which will make of you a slave to your creditors. You may have to borrow money to begin ownership of a home. But do not let it be so costly that it will preoccupy your thoughts day and night. [In *CR*, April 1998, 68; or "Living Worthy of the Girl You Will Someday Marry," *Ensign*, May 1998, 50]*

In October 1998 he stated:

*I am troubled by the huge consumer installment debt which hangs over the people of the nation, including our own people. . . .*

*We are carrying a message of self-reliance throughout the Church. Self-reliance cannot [be] obtain[ed] when there is serious debt hanging over a household. One has neither independence nor freedom from bondage when he is obligated to others. [In CR, October 1998, 70–71; or “To the Boys and to the Men,” Ensign, November 1998, 53]*

In October 2001 he stated:

*Life is fragile, peace is fragile, civilization itself is fragile. The economy is particularly vulnerable. We have been counseled again and again concerning self-reliance, concerning debt, concerning thrift. So many of our people are heavily in debt for things that are not entirely necessary. . . . I urge you as members of this Church to get free of debt where possible and to have a little laid aside against a rainy day. [In CR, October 2001, 89; or “The Times in Which We Live,” Ensign, November 2001, 73]*

And as recently as four weeks ago in the general priesthood meeting he admonished:

*Get out of debt and rid yourself of the terrible bondage that debt brings.*

*We hear much about second mortgages. Now I am told there are third mortgages.*

*Discipline yourselves in matters of spending, in matters of borrowing, in practices that lead to bankruptcy and the agony that comes therewith. [Hinckley, “To Men of the Priesthood,” Ensign, November 2002, 58]*

A review of these statements leads one to believe this is a matter of great concern to the prophet. We ought to take heed.

Critical to achieving self-reliance are budgeting and good financial management. It is best to live not within your means but below your means.

Occasionally I hear of young men and women who are always looking for the easy

solution to the comfortable life. Their ship is always just about to come in. Continued disappointments often result, however, in an unwarranted reliance on family members or an addiction to unemployment benefits. Now I am not disparaging those who legitimately and temporarily require assistance while they are investing in the future through education, training, and such or while recovering from unexpected hardship. But I do say that those who abuse the government system or inappropriately burden parents or others for support offend the very principles of the gospel.

It was God who said, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Genesis 3:19). More recently the Lord declared, “Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer” (D&C 42:42). Self-reliance is and always has been a sacred obligation and an important principle of the gospel.

Some of us may live in an environment or under circumstances that seem to provide little hope for our own temporal achievement. Often vision and opportunity are overwhelmed by generations of poverty, lack of self-esteem, feelings of despair, or lack of perceived opportunity.

Some time ago Sister Edgley and I were being chauffeured through a city in South America. Our driver was a stake president who was a convert to the Church. This stake president was a very successful international attorney. As we were passing the slums of the city—houses of cardboard and tin with no water, sewer, or plumbing of any kind—my wife asked the stake president where he grew up.

He pointed to the slums and said, “A place just like this.”

My wife then asked, “How in the world did you ever climb out of this kind of poverty to become the successful person you now are?”

The stake president simply responded, “It was the gospel. The missionaries came and taught us who we really were and what



we could become. My brother broke out, got an MBA from BYU, and now is the president of a large corporation in South America. My only other sibling is a sister, and she is a successful attorney.”

This story is repeated over and over—hundreds, even thousands of times. In fact, the restored Church was born out of poverty and what some would see as absolute hopelessness. But the Saints came to believe in themselves, who they were, and what they could become. And may I point out, I believe in you, and your Father in Heaven believes in you. You need to believe in yourself. You see, those of us who know that we are sons and daughters of God, created in the image and likeness of the Only Begotten, know not only who we are, but we know who we may become. Those of us who know we are sons and daughters of God, created in the image and likeness of the Only Begotten, are driven by our potential to make choices to secure the future.

### **Choose a Celestial Marriage and Eternal Family**

Choices of righteous living and choices of self-reliance prepare you for the most important and rewarding choice, the crowning ordinance of the temple—celestial marriage.

When God created the world, He did it in time periods that He called days. We don’t know exactly how long each day was, but the account is quite specific as to the sequence of events. On the sixth day, after the earth was created, it was populated with every “living creature after his kind” (Genesis 1:24). God then said, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26), for “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). Thus Eve was created out of a rib from Adam. And then God said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). It was not good for man

or woman to be alone then, and it is not good for man or woman to be alone now.

We have a beautiful and clear explanation of this doctrine given in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” Several important and clarifying principles are taught in this proclamation. Among them are the following:

First, “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God.” (This we have already discussed as being the basis of our value system that we use for making choices.) Second, “In the premortal realm, spirit sons and daughters . . . accepted [God’s] plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward . . . his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life.” And then, very importantly, “The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan.” (From “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.)

Of all our priorities, finding an eternal companion and establishing an eternal family should be our top priority. All other objectives and priorities should be subservient and supportive of this, the most important.

Although we should make appropriate preparations, we should not unduly delay marriage. We need not have satisfied all our wants and desires before marriage. We need not have the perfect car, the perfect home, the perfect job, or the illusionary perfect companion to have a perfect marriage. Acquiring and achieving many of these things together, as companions, builds the perfect marriage. Yours is the time of preparation for an eternal, everlasting, celestial marriage that we have been talking about. This is the season of planting, the season of choices.

As the prophets of Ecclesiastes indicated, there is a natural sequence of important preparation and events in our lives: “A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted” (Ecclesiastes 3:2).

Yes, yours is the important time of planting, a time of preparation for that which is paramount in your lives, a time to let your light shine forth. Each of you came into this life as a glorious similitude of our beloved Savior. You also came into this world as a “candle.” And there is only one person in heaven or on earth who can light that candle. Choose to light your candle.

Light a candle for righteousness. Light a candle for self-reliance. Light a candle for celestial and eternal marriage. These are the important choices that should flow from your

value system. You see, those of us who know we are sons and daughters of God, created in the image and likeness of His Only Begotten, will make many choices that will lead to our eternal destiny of everlasting life with God and with our precious families. We will light candles.

May this be your dream—to choose righteousness, to choose self-reliance, to choose celestial and eternal marriage. May it be your righteous obsession in life is my prayer for you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.