

Build Your Understanding

J. THOMAS FYANS

BYU. What does that mean to you? Hold in your hearts all the feelings and impressions that occur to you as you hear the letters *B Y U*. Perhaps tonight we can consider another dimension: *B–Y–U—Build Your Understanding*.

Build means to frame, construct, erect. It is a cumulative increase in power and effectiveness—*Build Your Understanding*.

Starting with a Blueprint

The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, “Ye are God’s building. . . . But let every man take heed how he buildeth” (1 Corinthians 3:9–10). Paul goes on to tell us that we are more than just a building: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

If we are to become builders, we must have a plan. The greatest desire of our Father in Heaven is to bring to pass our immortality and eternal life (Moses 1:39). He is the master builder. Because of his love for each soul he has provided a blueprint. Here is *our* blueprint: the holy scriptures, the *plan of salvation*, the gospel of Jesus Christ restored in its fulness, as explained in the scriptures—a *plan* of salvation with all the specifications and configurations of eternal truths necessary to build our temple, brick upon brick, culminating in lofty spires

beckoning the Spirit of the Lord to come and dwell within. Our do-it-yourself project must begin with a detailed study and pondering of this blueprint.

Building cannot proceed without tools—precision tools, each to perform an essential task. A carpenter is only as good as his tools. For our tools we are given a body with a reasoning mind and the agency to act for ourselves. We can’t blame Adam if we nail the shingles on our roof beginning at the top of the roof instead of the bottom, causing the overlapping shingles to be going in the wrong direction, which, of course, would not allow the rain to roll off. We are given the tool of repentance, a very special implement, provided at great personal expense to the giver, our Savior. In order to erect the supporting beams of our temple we are offered another significant tool, the power to act in God’s name, the holy priesthood with all its privileges and ordinances.

J. Thomas Fyans was a member of the Presidency 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 31 March 1985.

We now have a fail-proof blueprint and sufficient tools imbued with the power of God. Now comes the acquisition of the building materials. Building materials are also provided by the master builder, but they do not come free; there aren't even any discounts, no credit buying—full price must be paid with the requirements and covenants involved.

Opportunities and challenges will provide the building materials, opportunities for hands-on, line-upon-line experience so necessary in this educational process we are undergoing here on the earth. Opportunities provide the building blocks molded as the direct result of temptations, adversity, callings, and many other circumstances that are part of this mortal life.

As with any do-it-yourself project, there is considerable need for technical advice and moral support. At critical moments when our logic fails to provide a solution, the master builder is the only one who can give us direction. Each one of you, as builders, is entitled to divine assistance, personal revelation through the Holy Ghost. We have the responsibility and the opportunity to petition the assistance of one who can reveal the wisdom necessary to raise a building fitting not only for time, but for all eternity. Wisdom can also be derived from listening to direction from prophets of God. Much trial and error will be eliminated if our ears are diligently attuned to absorb these voices of experience. Putting our trust in the success of others, we proceed in strict obedience to those success patterns, often not sure of the need for such precision. Loving parents, still in the process of construction themselves, dedicate their lives to our meticulous instruction and help us begin a firm foundation. Experienced builders, our ward and stake leaders are given the stewardship of watching over our construction.

As our temple rises, we must be aware of our motives for its construction. How do these motives change our perception of the finished

building? So far our start has been good. We have a foundation built upon the rock of Jesus Christ and the gospel. We are collecting excellent building materials, materials molded by our challenges. The construction of its walls is now beginning. We have rejected counterfeit blocks—although hollow and much quicker to assemble, they have been proven to crumble under the stress of their own weight, and their supplier is nowhere to be found.

Hopefully, as we stand back and look at the beautiful harmony and balance of the structure taking shape before us, we will not mistakenly take credit. Nor should we allow ourselves to be overcome by its beauty to the point that we are prompted to fashion gaudy embellishments to impress those looking on. If our vision is clear, the plaque hanging over the entrance to our edifice will dedicate its activities to the Lord, rather than providing aggrandizement to the builder's accomplishments.

Your building process must be selective; you will find a need to set priorities. Many of you have never owned a home of your own. Tucked away in your mind at this moment is a vision of your dream house. Each time you tour a home show, or view the latest in design, you update these plans in your mind; perhaps this time it is a swimming pool surrounded with rich redwood decking and luscious foliage. You have not yet come to the point of doing much about limiting those dreams, but there will come a day when fact comes face-to-face with fancy. As is true in the temple we are building, the fact is we can have almost anything we want, but we cannot have everything we want—choices must be made. Judgments are not always between good and bad but sometimes between good and better. Goals must be determined. Time and energy must be reserved consistently in the development of talents toward those goals, giving up or sacrificing some things to gain others, delaying minor pleasures today in favor of major

satisfactions tomorrow. The act of today is the parent of tomorrow.

We plant wheat to harvest wheat. We plant tomatoes to grow tomatoes. If we plant wheat in a field, that field will not produce tomatoes. If we plant obedience to gospel laws, we will reap spirituality and a refinement in our lives. If we allow drugs to dominate our lives, we will become addicts and potentially reap all the side effects: loss of job, financial difficulty, divorce, sadness, and depression. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes.

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. [Luke 6:44–45]

You have determined that the temple is patterned after a master blueprint, you have the tools, you have begun a foundation attached firmly to the rock of the gospel. Materials are stacking up awaiting appropriate application. Now the building begins in earnest, a building which cannot rise without the builder—each one of *you*. *You* are now ready for the challenges of applying these building materials—at the same time developing new skills and refining others.

Our Role in the Construction

We are talking about the most important component necessary to build *your* under standing—it is the “*you*” in “*your*.” Through tremendous exertion of every fiber of *your* being, every thought of *your* mind, and feeling of *your* heart, *your* temple will rise in splendid glory. The all-encompassing dedication required to reach such a goal will require *your* single-

minded obedience and much sacrifice, *your* complete faith in the master builder, *your* concentrated study of the scriptures, *your* charity and willingness to serve, *your* dedicated determination, and, very important, *your* solicitations of a willing Father in Heaven, waiting to respond to your petitions.

In the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit and were expelled from the presence of the Lord, the Father asked, “Where art thou?” not because the Father needed to know—he already knew—but because Adam needed to face the question. And so, as builders of a precise structure, we must realize that it is our individual task to build our own temple, a task which will wait until we address the task—making evaluations and setting goals, making time to assess our efforts, being certain to return often to the blueprints our Father has given us, setting new priorities if necessary. We must know where we are.

If this is to be *your* building, then what are to be *your* payments? As part of our tools and building materials, we have available baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, priesthood ordinances, and much, much more. How many dollars would each of these items be worth to you, payment to be made in advance, of course? The world’s way is to ask for money; the Lord’s way asks for a different kind of payment. Alma said, “Whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely” (Alma 42:27). Then what is it the Lord requires? In D&C 64:34 we are instructed: “Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind.”

The success of any person on this earth is largely determined by the attitude of the mind and heart. Studies have shown that successful individuals are not necessarily endowed with superior amounts of intellect or education, but they *are* persistent, and they *continue* in their persistence day by day.

Your attitude is of extreme importance. Let's listen in on a conversation and the thoughts of a traveler.

While driving through California, I decided to take a detour across Death Valley. I had been warned not to risk getting stranded. So before tackling the valley itself, I pulled into the last lonely filling station to stock up with gas.

The solitary proprietor of the gas station was long, lean, rangy and laconic. His face had been tanned to saddle leather.

I reached my hand out of the window to feel the side of the car and withdrew it sharply with smarting fingertips.

"If it's like this in April," I said, "how high does the mercury go in summer?"

"Hundred-forty, hundred-fifty, mebbe."

"Do you mean in the shade?"

He grinned, his eyes screwed up in a sardonic twinkle, "Ain't no shade," he said.

Looking around, I had to admit he was right. "Don't suppose many cars come through here in the summer?"

"Nope. That'll be three forty-five."

"What do you do, then, in the summer?" I asked, fishing a five-dollar bill out of my wallet.

"Prospectin'," he answered. "Gold, silver, pumice, anything I can find. Reckon I put in around fourteen, sixteen hours a day at it, all summer long."

"My," I said, "that sounds like pretty hard work."

"Tain't," he replied. He hesitated as though to add something but then went to get my change. By the time he came back he had evidently corralled his thoughts in words.

"Guess nothin's really hard work," he said, "unless you'd sooner be doin' somethin' else."

He counted out into my hand a silver dollar, a quarter, two dimes and two nickels. I must have been too hot to take in what he said. It wasn't until I'd driven as far as Badwater and got out for a few moments to peer into the small stagnant pool which must have dashed the hopes of so many thirsty

pioneers, that I realized that he had handed me, along with those fugitive coins, a lasting piece of wisdom—a nugget of purer gold than any he had ever dug out of the hills.

"Guess nothin's really hard work," he said, "unless you'd sooner be doin' somethin' else."
[Jan Struther, *This Week*]

Man Must Hope

The challenges of life here on earth are perhaps even at this moment weighing down upon many of you. Often these obstacles to our building process seem overwhelming, especially if we must struggle with them daily.

May I share with you a story about some yellow chrysanthemums. One morning my wife and I were glancing out onto our patio. Sister Fyans and I live in a high-rise condominium, so our patio is ten stories off the ground. A southern exposure filled the room with the beautiful blue of the sky and the warmth of the morning sun. We were noticing the beauty of a brilliant yellow chrysanthemum plant in full bloom. Admiring its beauty, Helen reminded me I had given her this plant earlier that spring. It had bloomed and shared with us the radiance of its beauty. As the blooms fell, the leaves, too, shriveled and dried. What was left of these beautiful flowers was placed in the corner of the patio where they remained unattended. The forgotten plant remained there for several months with no life discernible at all.

Late that summer, as we were cleaning the patio, we noticed this pot. Helen had cut back the now brown stems and placed it in a spot where it would be convenient to water. She had heard that chrysanthemums could bloom a second time in the fall if they were properly nurtured. As the care and watering continued over a period of time, we noticed a few very small green sprouts coming out through the soil. This excited us to see life once again return. The response to our care encouraged us to the point that from then on the plant

received regular watering and plant food. Each day we anxiously watched this beautiful plant return to its full glory. Several more weeks went by, and this particular day, as we gazed at this beautiful plant which was again sharing its splendor with us, Helen informed me she had counted fifty-three blossoms.

At some point in time that chrysanthemum plant, stuck in a corner and forgotten, may be an exact analogy of your heavy heart as it struggles with a problem or experience. Don't ever give up—no matter how brown the leaves and brittle the stems. There is an abundant life that needs nutrients from the soil of the gospel and the moisture from heaven—life is eternal. The thirteenth article of faith tells us that “*we [must] hope all things.*” Ether 12:32 says “*man must hope.*” Moroni asked, “*How . . . can [ye] attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope?*” (Moroni 7:40). Hope and faith are attitudes of the mind and the heart upon which are based all our actions. *Building your understanding* is a process, not an event. With diligent, consistent effort, precept upon precept will allow that *hope* to swell.

Developing Greater Understanding

In Proverbs 2:2 and 4:7 we are told, “*Apply thine heart to understanding*” and “*With all thy getting get understanding.*” So far we have been diligent builders, following the blueprint, relying upon the Spirit for direction. But when does the *understanding* come?

About a year ago a new word processor was delivered to my office. The libraries in that word processor were blank, it was up to us to fill them with whatever we saw fit. Document after document was inputted into the computer. Most of my talks and reference material for future talks are slowly building. This base will continue to broaden, week after week, year after year. Tremendous amounts of information are just waiting—waiting for what? This word processor has the capability to search through its memory banks for every reference it has

ever been fed on a given word. In seconds I can have a list of documents to illustrate an important point. Information recorded line upon line, precept upon precept, all comes together at the precise moment that is most meaningful in my life.

We can compare ourselves to a computer consuming vast amounts of information in one day, or even in an hour, not all of it by choice. Living at this point in time on the earth, men and women today know more about the world and what goes on around it than even the most informed citizens of the past. For example, in a recent hour of television news, viewers saw reports about terrible earthquakes in Chile, accounts from the war zones of Nicaragua and from Iran, reports of comments made by the president as seen in the Oval Office, scenes of a fire in Provo, and views of an ancient Indian ruin in southern Utah. This passive input of thoughts and facts could be compared with an experience you may have had as you relaxed on a chair somewhere in the Wilkinson Center just watching all the people going by. Our lives can just go by also and we will have absorbed only that which passed as we sat. But we have been given our agency to determine for ourselves what we desire to incorporate into our understanding, thus implementing it into our thinking and action patterns. Our minds are only actively thinking a very small percentage of the time—most often we allow our thinking process to remain neutral, taking in only what passes by. At the end of seventy years or so upon this earth, we *all* will have a greater understanding than when we entered. But I would like you to comprehend what it will take to *build your understanding* to its full potential, looking forward to some circumstance in your future life when information recorded line upon line, precept upon precept, will all come together at the precise moment that is most meaningful. *Your* mind must envision *your* temple and the process of building,

complete in detail. Aspirations are forces that drive us toward understanding.

What we aspire to be, that in some measure we already are; what we deeply desire to possess, we have in some degree already acquired. If we are possessed of an ideal, it must be because we have in us the possibility of it. God does not put into wild geese the instinct to go south for the winter without a south to go to. We may see our ideas as surely as the sculptor sees the finished face in the rough marble even before he has taken up the chisel.

Someone has said: It is not so much how much you see as what you learn from what you see. It is not so much how much you learn as what you do with what you learn from what you see as you go—wherever you plan to go!

Enlarge Your Soul

Alma compares understanding to a seed:

Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me. [Alma 32:28]

With an eternal plan, and with day-by-day determination, at the end of your life here on this earth you will be able not only to *understand* that plan, but you will be able to *feel* that plan with every fiber of your being. You will have become one with the plan, just as the Father and the Son have become one with the plan and with each other. Any action in which you now engage will be in complete harmony with the plan—your temple is as complete as is possible upon this earth, the doors are open

and, as the Lord approaches and enters your temple, you are invited to walk with him. “Come and dwell with me forever,” he will say. Will it be worth the waiting, the sacrificing, the tedious day-by-day building? “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Come and dwell with me” (see Matthew 25:21).

The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, “Ye are God’s building. . . . But let every man take heed how he buildeth” (1 Corinthians 3:9–10).

You and I are more than just a building. Paul explains: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3 :16).

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, restored in our day, we are fortunate that our years as young adults need not be spent in drafting our own blueprint from the philosophies of men. We are so fortunate to have such tools of perfection as a reasoning mind and the agency to use it, plus all the expertise provided by the principles and ordinances of the gospel, plus the priesthood of God, the power to act in his name. A lifetime of opportunities and challenges will provide the building blocks for your understanding, one block at a time. Assistance is offered in the form of personal revelation from the master builder. The voice of the prophet, as well as the voices of other experienced builders, provides tried and true methods of temple building. The councils in heaven terminated with a resolution that each soul would have his agency.

The application of the plan, the procedure used to collect tools and building materials, is left up to the individual builder. In no other way can we build our understanding, or be able to determine the good from the evil. In no other way can we know joy. While the Father’s plan is specific, as is any blueprint for any building, much of the application of its design is left up to his individual children—there are no tract temples. Obedience to his plan

requires sacrifice, hope, faith, and determination with specific goals.

Enjoy building your temple. Remember the wisdom of the prospector, “Guess nothing’s really hard work, unless you’d sooner be doin’ somethin’ else.” When your building becomes especially laborious, bring to your mind the hope of my yellow chrysanthemums. Hope is the perfect place to begin to B–Y–U, *build your understanding*.

And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings. [D&C 88:11; emphasis added]

Jesus is the Christ—he is the beacon to light our way back to the Father. Use the fuel of *building your understanding* to propel yourself into the presence of the creator of the universe, the source of all light and truth. May you arrive in peace, I pray humbly in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.