

The Vision of Eternity

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My dear young brothers and sisters, how excited I am to be with you this morning. I bring you greetings from the living prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley. What a remarkable, wonderful man he is. Everyone loves him—members and nonmembers alike. Perhaps it is his unique humor and zest for life that attracts us to him.

Sometime ago I was entering the Church Administration Building early in the morning when I saw the prophet coming across the parking garage toward me. I waited for a moment, wanting to walk into the building with him. For the first time I noticed that he was carrying a cane.

“Mel,” he said, “how are you?”

“President, I’m just fine, but how are you? I didn’t know that you were using a cane. What’s the matter?”

“Oh,” he replied, “I’m having a little vertigo, and the doctors tell me I should use a cane.”

“My goodness,” I responded, “let me carry your briefcase for you.”

“Here,” he said, with a big smile on his face, “take the cane.”

I think he felt I needed it more than he did.

Well, we love him, and today I testify that he is God’s prophet, seer, and revelator for the entire world—a world that desperately needs a prophet, seer, and revelator.

Now what I have to say is extremely important. It is intended to help you move through this life, facing all of the challenges of mortality, and then to carry you into eternity.

On February 16, 1832, a group of men, 12 or more, were gathered together upstairs in the home of John Johnson in Hiram, Ohio. Among them were Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. As they were working on the translation of the Bible, they came to John 5:29, which refers to the resurrection of the dead. At that time a glorious vision burst into their minds, and they reported:

While we meditated upon these things, the Lord touched the eyes of our understandings and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about.

And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness;

And saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshipping God, and

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the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever.
[D&C 76:19–21]

Of course the vision was one of the most glorious and wonderful ever given to man. Now known as Doctrine and Covenants 76, it refers to the three degrees of glory.

One of those present was Philo Dibble, a devout convert to the Church, a friend to the Prophet Joseph, and a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. Later in his life as he described the remarkable experience of being in the room when the vision was received, he was asked if he had seen the vision. He replied, “I saw the glory and felt the power, but did not see the vision” (“Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Instructor* 27, no. 10 [15 May 1892]: 303). Just imagine, there he was in the very room where this grand event occurred, and he did not see it. Oh, he saw something and felt something, but he did not see the miracle of the vision.

Too many of us are exactly like Philo Dibble: We see the glory associated with the Church and we occasionally feel the power of it, but we never quite see the vision. Many times I have heard the Brethren say, “Do you see? Have you got the vision of what it is that we are trying to get into your hearts?” Today the vision I am trying to get you to see is of your life: beginning with your infant birth, then connecting the dots of mortal experience to the temple, and finally to eternity.

We tend to be distracted by so many things. We are so caught up in the excitement of the world and worldly things that we do not see the vision. I mention a few of the ugly things that keep us from having our “eyes . . . opened and our understandings . . . enlightened” (D&C 76:12) to the beauty of eternity.

The Love of Riches

So many focus all their efforts on becoming rich. Even students see education as a means of acquiring wealth rather than a means of becoming educated. If our hearts are set too much upon

the riches of the world, we become calloused, devious, deceitful, and unkind. I could mention a dozen more negative adjectives, but you get the picture. Usually those who love riches feel that the end justifies the means. And when they obtain wealth, they consider themselves better than their brothers. It was the prophet Jacob who said of those who had become rich: “[They] wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they” (Jacob 2:13).

We must be so careful. I have learned that possessions have almost nothing to do with happiness. However, the Lord promised the Nephites that riches would be theirs if they sought first the kingdom of God and had a desire “to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted” (Jacob 2:19). I assume that this beautiful formula would work for us as well.

The Praise of the World

To gain the praise of the world, we do the most foolish things. We embrace every style of hair: we spike it, color it, frizz it, and even shave it all off—all to get the approval of our peers. We pierce our eyes, ears, noses, and mouths and then hang gaudy jewelry from each as a witness of our desired inclusion into the world. We tattoo our bodies with senseless graffiti to be a part of the “in group,” only to discover that the “in group” is really the “out group” in the eternal perspective of things.

There are some who desire status, position, and honor. There are even a few who covet a position in the Church, thinking that therein can be found praise and honor. I recall Elder Bruce R. McConkie saying, “The only honor found in a Church position is the honor you bring to the position.” I know that is true.

One little boy and his friend were discussing their membership in the Church. One asked,

“Wouldn’t you like to be a General Authority someday?”

“I don’t know,” replied the other. “What do they do?”

“Oh, they just go to meetings and give talks all day.”

“Not me,” said the other little boy. “I can’t think of anything worse.”

Destructive Music

The enemy of man uses music to debase that which is most lovely. Even music can be destructive. It can stimulate the passions and dim any sensitivity to the Spirit. Do not be destroyed by tantalizing rhythms and suggestive lyrics. On the other hand, beautiful music can lift the soul. It can instill in our minds a desire to be gentle, sweet, and filled with love. It can cause men to become more Christlike. Music can soften the hardest heart and bring men to God. Can anything be more inspiring than the hymns we learned in Primary or the thrilling hymns of the Restoration?

When our children were little, we were often invited to sing as a family at firesides. Sister Hammond would play the piano, and the children and I would sing. Actually I was just a prop on the stage. However, I still remember their little curly heads and beautiful faces turned toward me as they sang “Daddy dear, tell me please, is the world really round? / Tell me where is the bluebird of happiness found?”

And I would answer, “Little one[s], little one[s], yes, the world’s really round / And the bluebird you search for will surely be found” (“Mon Enfant,” traditional).

Those were times never to be forgotten. Now when we are together, one of our favorite things to do is gather around the piano and sing such wonderful words as “I feel my Savior’s love / In all the world around me” (*Songbook*, 74–75) and, of course:

I have a fam’ly here on earth. They are so good to me.

*I want to share my life with them through all eternity.
Fam’lies can be together forever Through Heav’nly
Father’s plan.*

*I always want to be with my own family,
And the Lord has shown me how I can.*

The Lord has shown me how I can.

[“Families Can Be Together Forever,”
Songbook, 188]

Music has a great capacity to show us the vision.

Laziness

Don’t be lazy. There are moments when we need to relax, but the Lord’s formula is a great one: Rise early and go to bed early, accomplishing as much as possible in between. I hope that during your lifetime you will find happiness in good, hard work. To do well at BYU you must learn to study. Study is work. It requires great self-discipline and some sacrifice, but it is worth it. The work ethic you form here will go with you all of your life. Those who know how to jump into a difficult task and finish it never have to worry about procrastination and the worry and the stress that go with it. I love to work. It invigorates me. Oh, I get tired, but sleep comes more easily when I am weary.

I was once with Elder LeGrand Richards. He had called me to be a counselor in a stake presidency. I was very young and he was old. I was at his side all day helping him with the details of a reorganization. It was late, and I was afraid that he had overtaxed his physical limitations. I knew that I was spent. I said to him, “Elder Richards, you have worked hard all day. You must be exhausted. How do you do it?”

A huge smile crept over his face, and he responded, “Work, my boy? This isn’t work. This is play, and I am enjoying every minute of it!” I learned a great lesson that day about the difference between work and play, and I think I have finally come to understand what

Elder Richards was trying to teach me about seeing the vision.

Sometimes I think that the world is a madhouse. Even the Savior, as He spoke of the latter days, saw that “the whole earth shall be in commotion” (D&C 45:26). With wars and rumors of wars, plagues, and scourges, it is a time when all of us experience fear. We look for a way to escape from the discouragement, disillusionment, and uneasiness that exists all around us. This is a time for the strong of heart, for those of great faith, and for those who have made a commitment to move forward and not backward.

If we are to see the vision of our role in eternity, then we must see it through unclouded eyes—which means our lives must be uncluttered by riches, praise, bad music, or laziness. I have such a desire to help you see the vision of eternity a little more clearly. If you will do the following, I think it will help.

1. Be Determined

While speaking to his sons, the great Book of Mormon prophet Lehi said, “Arise from the dust, my sons, and be men, and be determined in one mind and in one heart” (2 Nephi 1:21).

The Prophet Joseph Smith had the ability to thrive on challenges. He faced many of them. Once he said to his cousin, George A. Smith, “Never be discouraged. If I were sunk in the lowest pit of Nova Scotia, with the Rocky Mountains piled on me, I would hang on, exercise faith, and keep up good courage, and I would come out on top” (in John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith, an American Prophet* [New York: Macmillan, 1946], 9).

Whatever the challenge may be—school, marriage, sickness, or death—if you are determined, you will come out on top. If you focus your mind—your intellect—on the most important thing and then move forward with all of your heart, you will win.

Remember, your focus is on the vision of eternity.

2. Be True at All Times

Be true to yourselves. Be true to your parents. Be true to your God. To be true means to be trustworthy, to be constant, to be loyal. When we speak of the 2,000 young warrior sons of Helaman, we think of their courage and their faith. Helaman said of them, “They were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted” (Alma 53:20). I have a strong feeling that those young men never missed their church meetings, never failed to have their prayers, and never had to be corrected because of their filthy language.

Just a word about your church meetings. Attend all your meetings. Be on time. Sit quietly. Stay to the end. There is far too much wandering around. Remember the admonition of the Lord: “Be still and know that I am God” (D&C 101:16). I believe *still* means to be quiet and stationary. Then the Spirit can come and testify to your heart and mind.

I remember my mother saying to me on one occasion, “Mel, I know that I can count on you.” I resolved that she would always be able to count on me. I would not let her down. I loved her too much. Her confidence in me meant everything. Today I still feel that way. I feel that way about the Brethren. I don’t ever want to let President Hinckley or any of the other leaders of the Church down. But, even more important, I never want to let the Savior down, because I love Him more than anything else. I am sure that all of you feel the same way.

Are you beginning to see the vision? If so, raise your hand.

3. Lead in Righteousness— Don’t Be Led into Wickedness

In my high school there were only two boys who were members of the Church: myself and another boy who was inactive. On a whim I decided that on Fridays, for a few weeks, I would wear a white shirt and tie to school. Surprisingly, after the first week, many followed my lead and came dressed in white

shirts and ties. One day the principal called me into his office. I had been there before for reasons that I would not care to mention today, but on that occasion he thanked me for setting a standard of dress for the rest of the boys, which he felt improved the spirit of the school. I felt good to know that I had led my friends to do a simple but uplifting thing and that it had been recognized by the school administration.

Everywhere I go in the Church, nationally and internationally, I find that our young men and young women are the leaders in their schools. They are the student body officers, the outstanding scholars, the finest athletes. They set the standard for morality and dress. Everyone looks up to them for guidance and excellence. Those that I am talking about are you. We are extremely pleased about your leadership. We expect nothing less from you, and neither does your Heavenly Father.

Are you getting it, the vision?

4. Find Love and Get Married

In three short days it will be Valentine's Day. Sister Hammond has reminded me of that. She is the most beautiful valentine in all the world. Although we joke and laugh some about a day when romance and love are on everyone's mind, I would encourage you to enjoy the lightness of the moment but also to consider how profoundly serious and eternally significant is the principle of love. Frankly, love is the key necessary to open the vision, for love leads to marriage and marriage leads to eternal life.

There is a real concern that you young men returning from your missions do not understand the absolute principle of eternal marriage. Your desire to be rich and well educated takes precedence over your obedience to an eternal law. You hesitate to date because you do not want to complicate your lives. You wait and wait, trifling with the seriousness of love until it becomes almost too late. The years pass by, all too quickly, and you have become older and, honestly, less sure of yourselves. You

have become rigidly established in your own ways. Most of the eligible young women are taken, and you are left with little more than your foolish vanity.

The Savior pulled no punches when He said:

In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;

And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];

And if he does not, he cannot obtain it.

He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase. [D&C 131:1-4]

I encourage you to date, find a girl that will assist you in honoring your priesthood covenants, marry her in the temple, have beautiful babies, and begin the lifelong journey of becoming a family together forever. Then, as far as you are concerned, the earth will not "be utterly wasted at his coming" (D&C 2:3).

You wonderful girls, dress modestly and keep yourselves physically clean. Be cheerful and happy. Be positive about life. Then the Holy Spirit will cause you to be more beautiful and attractive. And when a faithful priesthood bearer comes to carry you away on his white horse—which might be an '84 Ford—to the temple, you will be prepared in every way.

Is there a glimmer of understanding in your minds? Do you get it?

5. Fulfill Your Duty

Young men and women of the Church, you were born into the house of Israel. All of you are descendants of Father Abraham. Because of your heritage you have certain responsibilities. One of those is to keep yourselves unspotted from the sins of the world. This means that you will remain morally clean; that you will not be polluted by the extravagances of the world; that you will continue to keep all the commandments of God; that you men, as priesthood bearers,

will spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; that you will maintain the family unity into eternity by going to the temple with your chosen companion. What a remarkable and singular challenge it is to be a member of this Church.

To maintain the family unity is not only an essential principle. It tends to be the most beautiful doctrine of eternity. This is the essence of the vision that we wish to establish in your minds. You may see the glory of it and feel the power of it, but now we want you to see the vision—to get it in your minds and in your hearts. If you can internalize the story I am about to tell you, it will assist you to see the vision.

It was rather late at night when Sister Hammond and I entered the tiny apartment of the Florez family. They had just recently been baptized into the Church, and we wanted to visit them. Even though they were not quite sure what a General Authority was, they knew he was somebody quite important. The small apartment fairly gleamed from the mopping and polishing in preparation to receive us. Every member of the family stood to greet us as we entered. They were dressed in their finest clothing, which had been washed and pressed nearly to perfection. Everything had been done to make our visit as comfortable as possible, and each little child waited for us to express our approval for their supreme efforts.

We began by singing several hymns chosen by the children. Purposefully, we always suggest that we sing “Families Can Be Together Forever.” We asked them about the picture of the temple that hung on their wall and about the significance it had for them. They spoke humbly and sincerely about the time that they could go to the house of the Lord and be sealed together as a family forever. We talked about the difference the gospel had made in the family. I asked the children if they could see a difference in their father. They were happy to tell us that he seemed changed; that he treated their mother much better and that he seemed to love them more.

The father stood humbly before us, pleased to hear such words from his loved ones. Then he said, “Will you wait for a moment? I have someone special that I would like you to meet.”

We watched him climb the tiny, narrow stairs to the bedroom above. In a moment he came down carrying a sweet little child in his arms. It was a little boy. His tiny body was twisted and disfigured beyond anything we had ever seen in our lives. A crippling virus had destroyed him mentally and physically just days after his birth. Now, seven years later, there had been almost no growth and no progress. He lay very still in the loving arms of his father. Gently the father extended his little frame for us to see. Then he said, “This is our precious son, Maximiliano. I am so grateful for the message that the missionaries brought to us just one month ago, for we now know that someday this little son of ours will be completely healed. He will be whole in body and in mind. And he will be ours—part of our family—forever and ever.”

With that he returned the little boy to his bed in the room above. The tears erupted from our eyes. We had never seen greater faith nor greater love. It was a moment of pure revelation.

One year later the family was sealed in the Santiago Chile Temple. Maximiliano was there, in his father’s arms, to be sealed. In the eternities he will be perfect in mind and in body. They will be an eternal family because the Florez family had seen the vision.

Do you begin to see the vision? Is what you see the vision of eternity?

Life, if lived properly, allows the Holy Ghost to bring the vision into our mind. The perfect description was given by a loving Heavenly Father when He said, “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Furthermore, we will not only see the glory and feel the power, but life—from birth to

the temple and into eternity—will be ours, forever and ever.

Sometimes I have a dream that carries me into eternity. I find myself in a large hall surrounded by thousands of people. All of my family is there. On a lovely stage is a group of men. I gaze at them in awe, for there is the Prophet Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and apparently all of the holy prophets from the beginning of time down to the present day. Everyone seems to be waiting. A hush falls over the vast congregation. A man dressed in white appears. Without hesitation we all

fall to our knees, for it is the Savior, Jesus Christ. With His arms extended, He blesses us and expresses His great love for us. The joy I feel is almost more than I can contain—to feel His pure love. I pray that my dream will become a reality for you and for me.

I know that Jesus Christ lives. As one of those appointed to be His special witnesses, I testify that He wants each one of us to come back into His presence, where with open arms He awaits to receive us all. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.