

Your 1975 Game Plan

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President Oaks and my wonderful young friends of Brigham Young University, it's nice to be among friends. I'm grateful to my Heavenly Father for this assignment. I pray earnestly that we might be able to communicate well together as we meet here to discuss a common interest—our membership in this Church.

As we meet here at the beginning of another bright new year and contemplate the best possible utilization of the 360 days that remain, I rejoice with each of you that the spirit of Christmas is still fresh in our minds. With the stimulating thoughts of Christmas and the Savior, we can now establish goals that are more meaningful, objectives that are more worthwhile, and raise hopes for this year that can be framed truly and properly within the lofty and eternal concepts of peace on earth and good will toward men. As members of his church, you and I can do our planning for 1975 with faith and knowledge that God indeed lives, that life is eternal, and that all true joy and happiness will come most readily by conformity to gospel standards.

One critic recently observed that the Christmas theme of "peace on earth" is evidence that Christianity is not working, because there has been war and contention in these two

thousand years since the advent of the Savior. There has not really been peace on earth. It has been made clear by studying the activities of man for some six thousand years that this temporal existence has always been a constant replay of man's inherent imperfections and continuing dramatization of man's never-ending conflict with his fellowmen, of differing cultures, and of opposing ideologies. The basic selfishness of man has been used as the most lethal of all weapons by the adversary in his attempt to thwart the work of the Master. Yes, man continues without that peace that we would all so like to achieve.

However, the prophets declare that God's ways are not man's ways (see Isaiah 55:8). The Prince of Peace spoke the truth when he said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27). I have a firm testimony that the real "peace . . . which passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7) is a peace of mind that is possible to acquire even in this temporal set-

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ting of perpetual conflict and frustration. That peace offered by the Savior can even be found in foxholes at the battlefield. It is available in the face of adversity and heartbreak. It can be yours and mine to the same degree that we adopt a personal relationship with Deity or a personal testimony. This results in a life-style that is in harmony with the life of him who died that we might live. Not only may we live beyond the grave, but just as important, we may also live more abundantly here and now. We can have a peace of mind and an assurance that can be realized best by conformity with priesthood principles and by participation in the second great theme of Christianity—"good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). As we learn to love our neighbor as ourselves, we indeed become our brother's keeper.

Keeping an Eternal Perspective

May our plans, hopes, and dreams for 1975 be established on a foundation that has eternal perspective. While total perfection may likely elude most of us during the next twelve months, our game plan for the next year must surely call for an improvement, because you and I believe in eternal progression, which contemplates a constant striving for day-to-day improvement in our lives. Anything less than that is counter to Heavenly Father's divine plan. I can almost hear some of you saying at this very moment," It's all futile. Here I am only five days into 1975, and already I've goofed twice."

Young people, I want to assure you that you're not too far from par for the course. Just about everybody has had a bad start sometime or another. As I was watching the Rose Bowl game on television the other day, I had a flashback of something that happened on a high school football field not too far from that Rose Bowl many years ago when I was playing high school football. Speaking of getting off to a bad start, I think I hold the record. It was my first year of high school football. I'd been playing

second string all through the practice games, and this was the first big league game. Six thousand cheering people were in the stands. As we were breaking after our halftime pep talk, the coach suddenly said, "Simpson, you start the second half." The old adrenaline came rushing, and I went charging out onto the field. This was my chance. Just about that time the coach said, "Oh, and by the way, I want you to kick off, Simpson." I determined right then and there that I was going to kick that ball farther than any football had ever been kicked in history. I really wanted to make a good showing on my first chance on the first string. Well, the referee waved his arm and blew his whistle. I could hear those six thousand people. I looked at that ball and came charging down the field. I felt everything tingling in my body; the excitement was so high. Well, you have probably already guessed it. I missed the ball. Six thousand people went wild. But that isn't the half of it. This was back in the days when the quarterback held the ball with his finger. I broke the quarterback's finger.

Now, if you think that you're off to a bad start, I just want to set your mind at ease and let you know that it could be worse. I also want you to know that I had a coach that had confidence because he left me in. I don't know why, but he did, and I played the rest of the game. If I weren't so modest, I might also tell you that I made all-league that year.

Young people, this is a bright new year. Even though five days have gone, I want you to know that your start can be a good start even if you've already made one or two mistakes. Let me tell you a few stories.

I know a woman who was very active in the Church and true to the faith as recently as eighteen months ago. Today's she's critical of her childhood teachings, and she chooses to live apart from her former circle of Church friends. Why? Because adversity struck without warning. She lost her balance; apparently her foundation of testimony was inadequate.

She lost a loved one in a tragic accident, and her central thought today seems to be “If God really loved me, he would have prevented this terrible thing from happening.”

I also know of a young man who served faithfully and well for two years in a great mission of the Church. Less than a year ago, however, someone he looked up to and trusted made a serious mistake which led to excommunication from the Church. The adversary had found a weakness through rationalization. The weakness turned into a major problem, and it wasn't long before this friend, a giant, had fallen. Today this young returned missionary, who saw his hero fall by the wayside, has allowed the incident to get to him. He has become indifferent. His twenty-five years of good teaching and his commitment to God have been nullified because someone he admired turned out to be something less than he had hoped. This young man was placing his trust in the hand of man. I want to declare to all of you that no man is infallible. For you and I to be firm in the Church, we must place our trust in God and not in the hand of man.

There is another man who served long and faithfully in a key leadership role in his stake, only to be lulled away through temptation. He didn't fall through the bottom but seemed to fall off the top. His spiritual pursuits carried him into the mysteries which made him doubt basic doctrines. The teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ were too simple, and he refused to accept them as an important part of his new and sophisticated pattern of reasoning.

In the wake of the foregoing tragedies, there have been broken families and loss of dignity. None seemed to be the same person. As a matter of fact, they are not the same people. These brief accounts of some who have apparently lost their testimonies are perhaps extreme. In each case, however, there was that subtle beginning when the power of the adversary found an opening wedge—when that person began to justify his irregularity and to

criticize priesthood leaders. It was the same old familiar pattern, bit by bit. At first the transgression was ever so slight; in most cases it was thought to be just temporary: “Tomorrow I'll start the swing back.” So often tomorrow never comes, and Satan has won another victory.

Self-Discipline—Key to Eternal Life

Eternity always seems such a long way off. Just one day seems such an insignificant part of forever. Just one hour of self-gratification seems so trivial on the scale of here and hereafter. My message to you, my wonderful young friends, tonight, is this: Every day of 1975 is an important part of your eternal existence. The year 1975 will turn out best if your personal game plan for the next twelve months is sound, if your objectives are in harmony with truth, and if the execution of your 1975 game plan is carried out with a high degree of self-discipline. Without self-discipline, the daily crosswinds and less important demands of your time and attention will take over. Just one deviation, isolated and alone, seems so harmless, so insignificant. But please believe me when I say that each deviation paves the way for another and yet another.

Self-discipline, the key to eternal life, is doing something that needs to be done whether or not you find it convenient. Self-discipline is usually motivated by our convictions, our internal hopes, and our desires. I bear witness to you that there is no foundation as secure to Latter-day Saints as a personal testimony concerning this latter-day work. There is absolutely no motivation that can be as helpfully demanding as a knowledge that God lives, a restoration has taken place, and a living prophet directs the work. During 1975, adversity and heartbreak will come to many of you. Your expanding, vital, and living testimony of this Church should be the key to your self-discipline. Without self-discipline, the execution of your game plan will indeed be in jeopardy.

Building a Champion

Everybody likes a champion. Hero worship can be a good thing if we exercise a little care in picking the heroes worth following. Coach Edwards and the Cougar football squad are Western Athletic Conference champions. They are worth emulation. Without talking to Coach Edwards, I have a pretty good idea how that championship happened. Let me tell you about it. First of all, he found a group of young men who wanted to play football on a winning team. Second, the coaching staff and the team built confidence in one another. They became a team, each feeling that the team was more important than any single individual desire. Third, they worked hard for many months to learn their jobs. Fourth, they built a team spirit. Their confidence in each other led to enthusiasm. Fifth, in addition to their long-range objectives for a winning season they had a game plan for each weekend. Sometimes they had to make a whole new game plan for the second half, depending on how things went in the first half. During the first three or four games of the year, they had ten or twelve game plans. That's how we learn.

Now, by the same reasoning, I know how you, too, can have a winning season in 1975. First, get a team together that is eager for success. Find out if your heart, mind, eyes, ears, legs, arms, and hands all want to have a winning year. You've got a weak heart? It's going to be pretty tough. You have a doubting mind? It's going to be even tougher. If you have undisciplined eyes and hands that want to go in the wrong direction, you're not going to win many ball games.

Next, just like the Cougar football squad, you have to build confidence. Build confidence with your coaching staff. You all have a coaching staff. I'm talking about your parents, priesthood leaders, friends, instructors, and most of all, your Heavenly Father. Young people, communicate well with these people who are concerned for you and who love you. And

especially don't forget a daily communication with your Heavenly Father. You check in. I'm just simple enough in my belief to have the firm conviction that all of you young people have an eternal destiny that is known by our Heavenly Father. I believe that you've been foreordained. Most of you, I'm sure, have patriarchal blessings that spell some of that out. I know that Heavenly Father knows you personally by name, and when you don't check in to him or when things are not going right in life, he's concerned. He doesn't come down and intercede, however, because that's contrary to the plan. But we need to do what we can to maintain that communication on a daily basis.

Third, you have to learn your jobs just as Coach Edwards and his team had to learn their jobs. The line coaches worked with tackles. The end coaches worked with ends, and the backfield coaches spend time at their end of the field teaching the backs. Learn what you need to know. Specialize in truth. That's really the only thing that you can count on forever. Gain facility. Be teachable. Search out new ideas, new thoughts. Ponder them in your heart and hold fast to that which is in harmony with the truth. If you find something that stands off just a little bit at an angle with priesthood principles, you'd better look at it again and either find out how you can straighten it up or else discard it. I think it's just as simple as that.

We talked about enthusiasm on the team next. Work up some spirit and enthusiasm. It's an essential part of all real success. It is founded in sincerity and has a rich, spiritual overtone.

I'm tempted to pause for a moment and tell you about the greatest example of enthusiasm I've ever seen. Some of you have heard me tell this story before, but I can't think of a better one. I went to my first district meeting as a new missionary in New Zealand many years ago when we spoke a lot of Maori in the mission. They started the meeting, and my companion nudged me and said, "You'll be interested to

know that the next two hours are going to be on genealogy.”

I thought to myself, “Two hours on genealogy in a language I can’t understand. This is too much.”

After they introduced the first speaker, my companion said, “Brother Heremaia is the first speaker,” I shall never forget this great Maori as he stood up in his Polynesian way, with an overwhelming enthusiasm: “Tena koutou katoa!” He was bubbling over with this enthusiasm. I couldn’t take my eyes off him. I couldn’t understand what he was saying, but I had my eyes glued to him every second. I couldn’t detach myself from that enthusiasm.

Then my companion said, “He’s going to trace his genealogy from Father Adam down to the present day.”

I thought to myself, “That’s incredible. Nobody can do that.” Without looking in the Old Testament, without looking in the Book of Mormon, without a piece of paper, in his true Maori tradition of memorizing genealogy, he started back with Father Adam. He sort of close his eyes and said: “Ko arama te tangata tuatahi. A, I marena iwa. A ka puta mai a mea, ko mea, ko mea. . . .” He started with Father Adam, who was married to Eve and their children were thus and thus and thus. And then he came down through the Old Testament. “Ko mea marena mea, I puta mai mea, ko mea, ko mea. . . .” Finally he got down to Jeremiah’s time and jumped off with Lehi into the wilderness. Then he came down through the Book of Mormon: “Ko mea marena mea, I puta mai mea, ko mea, ko mea. . . .” All the time his enthusiasm was holding me right on the edge of my seat. He concluded with the only thing I could understand in my own language: “Ko Hirini T. Heremaia, Jr.—Ah, that’s me.”

That was to be the greatest example of enthusiasm I’ve ever seen. Brothers and sisters, enthusiasm is important as you follow through with what you have in mind for this great year of 1975.

The last point, as we compare ourselves with the football team, is that, whatever your objective for 1975, you will need to have dozens of intermediate monthly, weekly, and daily game plans. If you want a day of chaos, just start a day without a plan and then allow the whims and the fancies of the moment to direct your course. God’s house is a house of order. If we’re going to be members of this Church and if we’re trying to qualify ourselves for the presence of the Lord, I suggest that our houses be houses of order and that we have some daily plans.

My high school football coach used to say, “The best defense is a good offense.” I believe that. It’s impossible for your adversary to place points on the scoreboard as long as you have the ball. If you have a plan and if you spend your day acting rather than reacting to situations that are placed in your path, I want to promise that you’ll have a better year. You’ll be more successful. You’ll be more fruitful and you’ll be happy.

I can almost hear you saying right now, “I’m human. I fumble once in a while. I throw an interception.” Of course you do. And I’ve got news for you. You’re not alone. Mistakes and misjudgments are a part of this mortal existence. Even the Lord knows that we’re going to make some mistakes, but he is also very hopeful that we won’t keep making the same mistakes over and over again. Making the same mistakes repeatedly doesn’t sound like eternal progression to me. As members of this Church, you and I know something about the miracle of forgiveness, and we also know about and believe in a great principle called repentance. Without it, none of us would have a chance.

As we discussed a few minutes ago, there will likely be some unexpected obstacles along your path in 1975. Do you know when tragedy might strike? Do you know when a loved one might be taken from your immediate family circle? Do you know when a serious illness or

an accident might occur? We don't know that. What would your reaction be if someone you trusted betrayed you? How well equipped are you to handle extreme discouragement or depression? Maybe a D popped up on your grade report when you were certain of at least a B. That happens here, too, I understand.

What will you do when you find that your faith has been seriously challenged? Just how able are you to resist temptation? What do you do when your body demands gratification that you know is wrong? People need added strength to meet unusual circumstances. True champions are usually those who have been able to survive more unexpected problems than the rest of the people. The blessings of heaven are in store for those of Heavenly Father's children who don't collapse when the game plan goes wrong. A prophet of God—even the Prophet Joseph—cried out from Liberty Jail, "Oh God, where art thou?" (D&C 121). His game plan had gone wrong. He had had the bottom drop out. "Oh God, where art thou?" can you hear even a prophet making this plea in desperation? And then, just as though Heavenly Father had tenderly taken up a little boy into his arms, he said, "My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes" (D&C 121:7–8).

This promise is not reserved for prophets. This blessing and this promise can be just as much yours. Heavenly Father will not forsake you in your righteousness. Adversity will come. The important thing is, how do we face it? How do we overcome it? What do we do about it? What kind of a testimony or a foundation do we have that's going to help us to stay on top and not be submerged? The Lord, speaking in the Doctrine and Covenants, says this: "Therefore, they must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham. . . . For all those

who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified" (D&C 101:4–5).

My wonderful young friends, if you and I ever plan to live in the presence of the Lord someday, we need to be sanctified. We need to be subjected to the refiner's fire. I don't particularly think that Heavenly Father comes down and gives us adversity in our lives. I think just because you and I live here in mortality there's going to be enough adversity to go around. There are misjudgments and mistakes here in this mortal sphere, and sometimes even the innocent are hurt very badly. But the important things are how do we respond, how do we react, and what do we do about it. You know, the Doctrine and Covenants talks about our possibilities. It talks about principalities and powers, dominions and exaltation (see D&C 121:29). Have you ever thought about being involved in some of those things? It seems almost incredible. I think Heavenly Father is looking for thousands who can inherit all that he has and stand at his side and share in his dominion and exaltation. We stand here in mortality. If we're interested in eternal progression and exaltation in the celestial kingdom, we're talking about someplace up in the ceiling. No matter how you look at it, it's uphill all the way. It takes some effort, energy, and planning. You just don't get from here to there as the wind blows you. It must come through self-discipline to basic testimony and to all these things that we've alluded to here this evening.

Planning for the New Year

Now, young people let me suggest three things to include in your planning for 1975. First, I want you to be able to learn more about your Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We're told that "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). If we are interested in sharing all that the Father has, we must know the Father and his son. I would like to suggest that your priesthood,

Sunday School, and religion classes that you're taking here at BYU are not really adequate. You've got to do something on your own. Can you find just ten or fifteen minutes in your day for pondering, not just reading, one more chapter of the Book of Mormon or one more section of the Doctrine and Covenants? Can you do that, young people, in your game plan for 1975? Now, you have to find some quiet time, which isn't easy to find on this campus. Have you ever thought about five-thirty in the morning? It can be pretty quiet in your apartment at that time. You might have some time then to contemplate with the Lord another chapter in the Book of Mormon.

Second, in your game plan for 1975, pursue your studies with an eagerness to learn. To waste time and money is an insult to God. It's a betrayal to your parents and a great disservice to you as an individual. You're not on this campus to waste time and money. It is contrary to the plan of God.

The third point I would make with you might seem unimportant. However, after sitting at 47 East South Temple and talking to a lot of people for a lot of years in private counseling sessions, I want to admonish you with all the fervor of my heart and soul to get out of debt and stay out of debt. Young people, if you'll follow this great admonition of the prophets, you will learn one of the great lessons of mortality. You'd be surprised how many of the troubles start, especially in marital situations, when there is a misuse of family funds, when there has come a breakdown by people using poor judgment and spending money they do not have. Learn that lesson on the campus of Brigham Young University. As you stake out of debt, you'll be a better student. As you stay out of debt, you'll be a better companion to whomever you might be dating next Friday night. And if you'll stay out of

debt, you'll be able to keep yourself more spiritually alert and to do that which you've come here to accomplish in a much better way.

I close with three quotes from the Savior: (1) "If ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27); (2) "If you love me, keep my commandment" (John 14:15); and (3) "For without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Now, young people, if you're sharing the room with a few other students, and I'm sure most of you are, why don't you try to have some harmony and oneness in that setup? Why don't you go out of your way for your roommates? Why don't you go out of your way for your classmates or those that you share facilities with on this campus? "If ye are not one ye are not mine." Become one with your Church leaders. Become one with your faculty administration. Believe in this school just as you believe in the Lord, and life will be sweeter for you.

"If ye love me, keep my commandments." Be of service. Try to help somebody else along the way. Keep the Sabbath day holy. Observe the Word of Wisdom. Believe in the law of tithing. Even if you can't pay it right now, believe it. Promise the Lord that you're going to start paying as soon as you become a wage earner.

And that last admonition, "For without me ye can do nothing." Young people, may the Lord bless you and help you to arrange an appropriate personal game plan for 1975 that will improve your life, help you to become spiritually strong, and help you to become academically equipped to meet the world and make a contribution to this nation and to this world. That you may be able to do it all, to stay out of debt, and to do that which the prophets have given you to do is my humble prayer for each of you. I ask it humbly in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.