

So, What Do You Really Want to Be When You Grow Up?

ROBERT H. TODD

You are such a beautiful and impressive sight! I wish each of you could stand where I am standing right now and see what I see as I look into your faces. You are the ones the Lord is counting on to help prepare for His Second Coming!

As I have prayed about what I might say to you this morning, I have felt that the most valuable thing I could say, above all else, would be to testify to you that our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, love you with a perfect, infinite, and enduring love.¹ There are many things that I confess I don't know, but I know this to be true. I also know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that the Book of Mormon is exactly what it claims to be. I know that, as Joseph Smith said, "The Book of Mormon [is] the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."²

Brothers and sisters, I know that Jesus Christ is my Savior, my Redeemer, and my Advocate with my Heavenly Father. I know that as I am eager to be taught and to repent—willing to change and to strive to become like a little child—my sins can be forgiven. I know that because of His Atonement, when I come unto Him, my heart can be changed. I love Him, and

I am grateful, more than I can ever find words to describe, for all that He has done for me.

The Christian world is about to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and, knowing what we know, we ought to be the best Christians in the world in how we treat each other. I believe with all of my heart that if our Savior Jesus Christ were to walk into this room this morning amongst us here, the two most significant characteristics we would observe and feel about Him would be His overwhelming glory and His perfect love for us—each and every one of us, individually!

Brothers and sisters, I know that the Church is true. It is all that it claims to be. *It really is true!* I am grateful that my Heavenly Father has given me this testimony, and I feel an obligation to share it whenever I have the opportunity. I have found that sharing my testimony is one of the greatest privileges of my life. I have found, as President Boyd K. Packer has taught us, that "as you give that which you have, there is a replacement, with increase!"³

As I have felt impressed that sharing my testimony would be the most valuable thing

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I could do this morning, I have also felt impressed to ask you a personal question. May I do that?

Have you ever thought carefully and deeply about what you really want to be when you grow up? It doesn't matter whether you have chosen to be an engineer, economist, psychologist, physician, physicist, sociologist, scientist, printer, plumber, philosopher, or whatever. All of these professions can be wonderful in blessing the lives of others and can bring you great fulfillment when done well. But what *attributes* do you really want to have as one of our Heavenly Father's children? What kind of person do you really want to be? Most important, what do you want to be like the day you stand in front of God? What kind of character do you really want to have?

In the quiet, reflective, deep, soul-searching moments of your life, you have probably thought about this and have made at least some decisions. I promise you that one day—if you haven't already thought about this carefully—you will, and this experience will help you begin to see the need for the Atonement of our Savior Jesus Christ. You will begin to see where you are compared with where you really want to be, and you will begin to feel your dependence on our Savior Jesus Christ and His Atonement. As you do this, your heart will begin to be softened and the Holy Ghost will give you impressions of what you should do to be better. Not only that, but you will begin to feel that you *can* be better because of your faith in Him and what He has done for you. You are of noble birthright. You are one of His children. God will help you do it!

Our Heavenly Father, because He loves us perfectly, has given us a very special gift along with the privilege of coming to this earth as mortal beings to use this gift with all of the challenges, difficulties, and opportunities that a mortal state provides. This special gift is our moral agency. Because we have been given this precious gift, we are the ones who will

choose what we will become. Though each of our circumstances and individual choices will be different, the choices that we make, no matter what our circumstances, will make all of us what we will become. We are our "own judges."⁴

Some years ago I heard of a parable told by an old Cherokee chief who was trying to teach his grandson this principle. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight at times, and the fight is between two wolves. One is evil—he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, self-doubt, jealousy, and ego. The other is good—he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on inside of you—and inside every other person too."

The grandson thought about what his grandfather had said to him for a minute and then asked, "Grandfather, which wolf will win?"

The old chief simply replied, "The one you feed."⁵

President David O. McKay, a prophet of God, put it this way:

Each of us is carving a soul this very minute—our own. Is it going to be a deformed one, or is it going to be something admirable and beautiful?

*Yours is the responsibility. Nobody else can carve it for you. Parents may guide, and teachers may help with suggestions, but each young man and young woman has the responsibility to carve his own character.*⁶

While the Savior walked the earth and taught His gospel in the land of Jerusalem, a certain lawyer, tempting the Lord, asked Him a question, saying:

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.⁷

The Savior also taught us: “Come, follow me.”⁸

The opportunity of this life, then, is to use our moral agency to choose to follow our Savior and to learn to love God and our fellow man as God loves us. The book of John says that “God is love”⁹ and that “perfect love casteth out fear.”¹⁰ We can choose anything we really want, but the greatest opportunity we have is to choose to become like Christ and our Heavenly Father.

It is not always easy to love God and our fellow man. At times it takes great effort to do this, and we must learn to school the use of our agency and yield our hearts to God, as the prophet Helaman taught in the Book of Mormon.

Helaman spoke of a people who had learned why they were really here on this earth and acted accordingly. Listen to these words from this prophet:

Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.¹¹

As we choose to school our agency and practice yielding our hearts to God, we bump into the natural man within us again and again. I would like to share a story with you that helped me understand something about the natural man within each of us and how that

natural man can react. When I was a boy I had a wonderful little cocker spaniel dog named Smokey. Smokey liked to play ball by having me throw the ball as far as I could behind the shop in our backyard, by the woodpile, among the fruit trees, or in the garden—wherever. Smokey would not give up until he found that ball and brought it back to me, only to repeat the cycle again and again. Smokey became my best friend, and I loved to play with him day after day.

Smokey had only one fault. Not only was he obsessed with chasing and retrieving tennis balls, but he was also obsessed with climbing our front fence and chasing after loud trucks passing by on our side street.

One day I heard a truck coming, and immediately I thought of Smokey. Before I could reach the front gate to stop him, he had climbed the gate and was already halfway across our front lawn, headed for the wheels of the truck at full speed. I called for him to stop as loud as I could, but it was no use. Within an instant he was nipping at one of the rear wheels of the truck, running to keep up. A few seconds later one of his rear legs somehow slipped and got caught under one of the wheels, also pulling his pelvis under the wheel. Smokey was left in the street crying and yelping in tremendous pain. I ran over to him and tried to comfort him. As I got close enough, he immediately bit my hand as hard as he could. I was astonished. Why would this wonderful dog I loved so much bite me? My mom came out of the house, and somehow we were able to get Smokey in a large burlap bag and into the car. At the vet’s office we were told that Smokey’s body had been so badly hurt that he would have to be put to sleep. I was devastated and confused.

What happened was not an easy thing for a little boy to understand. It took me some years to learn the lesson from the experience. Those who are hurting often strike out and hurt those they love most, simply because they are hurting. Have you noticed that sometimes when we hurt, this is how we treat our Heavenly Father

and others? This is not how our Savior acted when He was hurt—when He was despised and spit upon by others and when He was crucified.

It is not easy, but, in the long run, learning to act like our Savior Jesus Christ and to love our fellow man and God no matter what hurt may come to us is easier than any other alternative. With God’s help I know we can overcome the natural man and become like Him.¹² Elder Gene R. Cook explained it this way: “As we increasingly think and act like Him, the attributes of the natural man will slip away to be replaced by the heart and the mind of Christ.”¹³

Many years ago I learned from a wonderful man who served as my mission president, Elder Glen L. Rudd, that all of us need four things in our lives:

1. We need to be loved.
2. We need to be trusted.
3. We need to be understood.
4. We need to feel that our work is appreciated.

When any one or more of these four needs are missing in our lives, we often will act as we ought not to act. Understanding this can be a great help in learning to love others, no matter what they may do. It can also help us see why we are not acting at times as we ought to be acting. When you see a friend or loved one letting the natural man take over and not acting as they ought to, ask yourself which one or more of these four needs might be lacking in their lives—or, for that matter, we should ask this same question when we are not acting as we ought to act in our own lives.

I want to make you a promise. If you see someone acting as they ought not to act, ask Heavenly Father if there is something you might do to help them feel more loved, more trusted, more understood, or more appreciated for their efforts. If you ask sincerely, really wanting to help because you love them—and God—the Holy Ghost will give you some

inspiration—even revelation—concerning what you might do to be of help.

Do you not see that one of the great mysteries of godliness that many never see is that when we use our agency to choose to give our love away, we gain more love and we become more like our Savior and our Heavenly Father? Does knowing this not give every one of us an added opportunity for service and a way to show love to our fellow men? Can we not see that we must learn to give away what we would hope to gain to become like God?¹⁴ This is what our Heavenly Father does for us. Do we *really* want to be like Him and our Savior when we grow up?

I would like to invite one of our precious granddaughters, Emma, to sing one verse of a Primary song that for me says it all. She can sing it so much better than I can say it. Emma just turned five.

I’m trying to be like Jesus; I’m following in his ways.

*I’m trying to love as he did, in all that I do and say.
At times I am tempted to make a wrong choice,
But I try to listen as the still small voice whispers,
“Love one another as Jesus loves you.
Try to show kindness in all that you do.
Be gentle and loving in deed and in thought,
For these are the things Jesus taught.”¹⁵*

Each one of us has a short window of opportunity to learn to yield our hearts to God—that is, to use mortality to become more like our Savior by learning to love others as God and our Savior love us. To illustrate this I will share one last story.

I knew a man who lived in Sugar City, Idaho, when the Teton Dam broke in 1976. I heard the story from one of his friends, and I spoke with him some years ago before he passed away to confirm its truthfulness. I share it with you to illustrate how a man can come to love God and yield his heart to Him—can give God his agency, so to speak, because he only wants to

do what God would want him to do and not what he himself would want to otherwise do.

In 1974 President Spencer W. Kimball had asked members of the Church to fix up our homes, our barns, and our yards.¹⁶ President Kimball told us that nonmembers of the Church would judge the truthfulness of the Church by how well we took care of what we had been given, which, by the way, I know to be true. After President Kimball had given the Church this counsel, my friend was out in his front yard one morning painting his fence and planting petunias with his wife. He had painted his barn the week before. His family had about 40 acres of land, and they were raising their seven children with the help of 40 milk cows. You get the picture.

A neighbor stopped in front of his home. The neighbor asked my friend what he was doing painting his fence and planting those flowers in his front yard. My friend kindly reminded his neighbor that President Kimball had asked us to fix up our homes and our yards. He then said to the neighbor that he wanted to be obedient.

My friend's neighbor chided him a bit, saying, "Painting your barn and fence and now planting those flowers—that's not going to increase your milk production any."

My friend simply said something like this: "You are probably right, but President Kimball has asked us to do it and I want to do it."

Within two weeks the Teton Dam broke and more than 200,000 acre-feet of water came down the Snake River Valley, destroying virtually everything in its path.¹⁷ I don't know if you can envision what more than 200,000 acre-feet of water is like. It was a wall of water about 10 feet high and seven miles wide. Thinking of it more like an engineer, it's 200,000 acres of land covered with more than one foot of water, or one acre of land covered with a column of water more than 37 miles high.

All of my friend's milk cows died. His barn was severely damaged. His house was

mostly destroyed. The fence in front of his home—the one he had been painting just a few days before—was gone, not to mention the petunias.

A few days after the flood, my friend saw his neighbor—you remember, the one who chided him a bit for fixing up his place. Only this time he said, "Aren't you sorry now [with a certain spin on the word *now*] you took that time to paint your barn, fix your fences, and plant those flowers?"

My friend Marion hesitated for just a moment and then said, "No, they were ready to be taken."

My friend had learned to use his moral agency in *his* window of time wisely. By his obedience to a prophet of God he was preparing *himself* to be taken—preparing himself to stand in front of our Heavenly Father with a character more like our Heavenly Father and our Savior Jesus Christ. This too is your opportunity and mine, brothers and sisters.

Would you like your confidence to wax strong in the presence of God? The scriptures teach us how we can do that:

*Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God.*¹⁸

May I challenge you "to an experiment upon my words" today?¹⁹ In this day of headsets, iPods, and cell phones and with everyone living in their own somewhat isolated world, start with simply looking people in the eye as you leave this devotional today and smile. Say hello as you walk across campus. Your whole day will change, and someone else's will too! Be friendly and kind. Look for the good in others. Praise them for the good they do. Greet people, even those you don't know—maybe especially those you don't know. Lift them up. Who knows, you might even get a date with someone!

There is way more isolation and negativism in this old world than there will ever be in the celestial kingdom. What we do here and now to work against the natural man (like against gravity, so to speak) will develop our spirituality and help us to become like God. How we decide we are going to treat others here and now can make all the difference in the world—and in you.

So what do you really want to be when you grow up? Do you want to be a person like our Savior or like somebody who is all by themselves? Look for ways to lift others up. “Cease to find fault.”²⁰ Ask our Heavenly Father how you might help someone feel more loved, more trusted, more understood, and more valued and appreciated for their efforts. The Holy Ghost will give you feelings on how to do this if you ask for them and really want them. The Lord has promised us this.

I plead with you to earnestly ask our Heavenly Father for the gift of faith in His Son Jesus Christ. When we have faith in Him (which will come as a gift when we sincerely want it and live for it), we can be blessed with hope that His Atonement will apply to us—yes, even we who are imperfect! But to have faith in Him, we must also know what He is like and want to be like Him. If we genuinely ask for this kind of faith in Him, we can have our hearts changed so we will want to love God and our neighbor. We will do all we can to love one another, just as the Savior did.

The Savior said, “Come, follow me.” I think my little granddaughter Emma got it just right. I too am trying to be like Jesus!

I love you brothers and sisters. I am grateful for the privilege I have been given to address you today and to bear my testimony of my Savior and of His love for you and for me. I know that He lives and that He will help you and me keep His commandments to love Him and one another and to become like Him. I have come to know that when I yield my agency and my heart to Him—no holding

back—He will give me even more agency. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. From Russell M. Nelson, “Divine Love,” *Ensign*, February 2003, 20.
2. Joseph Smith, *HC* 4:461.
3. Boyd K. Packer, “The Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, January 1983, 55.
4. Alma 41:7; see also Helaman 14:30–31.
5. Attributed to George Bernard Shaw; see also Carl McMurray, “Two Wolves,” <http://www.spiritbuilding.com/articles.html>; see also Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit: Activating God's Power in Your Life* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1978), 81.
6. David O. McKay, *Secrets of a Happy Life*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 146.
7. Matthew 22:36–40.
8. Luke 18:22.
9. 1 John 4:8, 16.
10. 1 John 4:18; see also Moroni 8:16.
11. Helaman 3:35.
12. See Mosiah 3:19.
13. Gene R. Cook, “Charity: Perfect and Everlasting Love,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 83.
14. For more concerning this principle, see Boyd K. Packer, *That All May Be Edified* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 253–61; also Neal A. Maxwell, “Remember How Merciful the Lord Hath Been,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 46; and Mosiah 4:26.
15. “I’m Trying to Be Like Jesus,” *Songbook*, 78–79.
16. See Spencer W. Kimball, “God Will Not Be Mocked,” *Ensign*, November 1974, 4.
17. See *That Day in June: Reflections on the Teton Dam Disaster*, ed. Janet Thomas, Bernice McCowin, Mary Tingey, and Margaret Thomas (Rexburg, Idaho: Ricks College Press, 1977).
18. D&C 121:45; see also verse 46.
19. Alma 32:27–34.
20. D&C 88:124.