

Opportunities: Faith, Opposition, and Friends

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Good morning, my brothers and sisters. Thank you for being here today. I pray that we may share some insights that will lift and encourage our spirits and help us in our pursuit of excellence. My message is based on a statement made by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland back in the fall of 1981, when he stated: “The opportunity of a lifetime has to be taken in the lifetime of the opportunity” (“Virtus et Veritas,” in *BYU 1981–82 Fireside and Devotional Speeches* [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1982], p. 12). This morning let us look at opportunity in light of faith, opposition, and friendly support.

Faith

Some opportunities in our lives may take place over time. Some opportunities occur in a moment suddenly with a phone call, an interview with a member of the bishopric or stake presidency, or a similar means of invitation. Nearly all of these opportunities require one degree or another of our faith and personal convictions. Such an opportunity came unexpectedly to me a while back.

One morning a very dear friend of mine called me long distance and told me that she was scheduled to go to Perth, Australia, to deliver two hour-and-a-half keynote addresses

and present a half-day workshop for a national conference. People would be attending the conference from all over Australia. Her assignment did not surprise me, considering her eminence and position. Then she said, “Sally, I can’t go. I am scheduled for surgery on my back, and my doctor has told me that it would be altogether too dangerous for me to travel at this time. Will you go and cover for me?”

As you can imagine, this suggestion put me into a mild shock. I had enough sense to ask, “When are you scheduled to go?”

“Tomorrow,” she said.

Experience has taught me that major decisions in life should generally not be made spontaneously, so I told her I would call her back in an hour. I sat for a few minutes and simply shook. Then I told my husband and counseled with him about it; I consulted the Lord about it; and then I called my department chair, for this was the end of winter semester, and though all classes were over, we were just going into final exams.

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My department chair said, “Go ahead and do it.”

Since I had made commitments relative to BYU graduation exercises, I called my dean and told him about this opportunity. “Go do it,” he counseled.

Amazingly, I felt spiritually at peace about the task, and so I called my friend and said: “Tell me again about the timing on this Australian commitment.”

“Well,” she admitted, “I did agree to give some smaller workshops in Sydney prior to the national conference in Perth. The conference itself is in four days.”

So I told her to call her friends in Sydney and tell them that she would come visit them when she was able to; I would take care of the national conference.

From the time I agreed to take care of the conference, a spiritual cloak of support and peace came over me. From that time on everything moved with smoothness and incredible efficiency. My husband informed me that I had a valid visa for Australia and my passport was current, both of which were essential for my speedy departure.

For the Australian conference my friend had prepared to give one keynote address on the topic of brain research, and I knew that where I was concerned that topic had to change, but all the other topics could be presented as scheduled. It was fortunate that I had already either taught classes, written articles, or given presentations on the keynote and workshop topics, and I just needed to change their orientation and focus a little.

It did not take long for me to discover that I was in fact on the Lord’s errand. Unexpectedly faith-promoting experiences occurred for me throughout that short week. Let me briefly share two of the more profound occurrences. When I arrived in Perth, I was met by a colleague who took me to the lovely room that was provided for me. He asked if I might like to go out to the college and look over the

auditorium where I would be speaking. I thought it a splendid suggestion. We drove quite a way out to the campus, and when we arrived at the building in which the main plenary sessions would be given, I found to my delight that they would be held in the chapel of the college. A custodian met us at the door and let us in. The podium and stand of the large chapel were in the center of the far wall, and on either side of the podium were windows floor to ceiling overlooking a beautiful lake and lovely trees. This was an amazing and inspiring setting. My host invited me to step up to the podium so that we could check out the audiovisual equipment. On the podium was one of the largest Bibles that I have ever seen, opened and inviting.

“Read something, and let’s check out the sound system,” he said.

I looked down at the Bible and read the first verse that came to my sight: “But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

I was stunned. I looked at my host and wondered if earlier in the morning he had deliberately opened the Bible to that page containing a scripture that was the essence of my message there in Perth, but he had no way of knowing what I would read, and the room had been locked when we arrived.

The next day when I delivered my first keynote address, there was a heckler in the audience. The local people knew about him and anticipated his behavior, but I did not. He was a brilliant and gifted but undisciplined maverick. He kept asking questions that challenged the validity of my remarks. At one point he said, “What makes you think there is any such thing as gifts or giftedness?”

Immediately the incident from the day before came to mind and was so fresh in my thinking that I cited the scripture and told him that the scriptures verified the existence of gifts and our responsibilities relative to these gifts.

The heckler remained silent for the rest of the session. Afterward it occurred to me that ordinarily I would never have dared to bring in scriptures or direct religious dialogue at a national conference. At lunch I was cornered by some people who asked me how I dared to mix the spiritual with the academic, and I told them that I genuinely believed there was nothing that was not basically spiritual.

Another profound incident occurred when my hosts told me that a picture had been requested by the local newspaper. They wanted to take my picture with a gifted child. "Fine," I said. "This should be easy, for probably any child will do for the picture."

"Not so," they said. "We need a gifted child; wait and see what happens." I told them to locate the child, and I would cooperate as requested. Later they called and told me that they had a gifted five-year-old boy scheduled, and he would be there in the morning for a photo session. As I was thinking of this meeting, I wondered what I might give this small boy as a gift from America. As a general practice I take a few things with me that can be used as thank-you or friendship gifts. I had brought with me three small jars of Bear Lake raspberry jam and a couple of beautiful calendars. I did not think any of these items would necessarily appeal to a five-year-old boy. Then I reflected back to my hurried departure from home when I had cleaned out my purse and replaced only those items that I felt were needed on the trip. At the last minute I had included an item that could serve as a gift for this little boy.

In the morning the little boy came with his mother. There were also two people from the newspaper. One interviewed the mother while the other one came with me across the street with the small boy. We sat down on a bench by a beautiful river with black swans nearby. While the photographer took pictures, this small boy told me about the orbiting procedures of spaceships as he showed me the book he was reading. At a quiet time I told this little

boy that I had brought him a magic ring from America.

"Magic? Is it really magic?" he asked.

I told him that it was not magic as most people think of magic, but that it could do magical things for him. We put the ring on his finger, and I asked him to identify the letters on the ring. He did so, and I told him what the letters represented. "Whenever you have an important decision to make, look down at your ring, and it will remind you to 'Choose the Right' and to base your decisions on important principles."

He was entranced with his ring and could not take his eyes off it. When we returned to meet with his mother, he ran up and told her about his ring. "Oh, my," I thought, "his mother could be quite upset over this."

But the mother listened intently to her son and then turned to me and, with gratitude showing in her eyes, simply said, "Thank you." Somewhere in Perth, Australia, is a small and very gifted little boy with a Primary CTR ring.

My week was filled with these amazing experiences, and once again I was taught the importance of faith and prayer. When you are in partnership with the Lord you can accomplish wonders far beyond your acknowledged abilities. You are, however, expected to do your part: to exercise faith, self-discipline, and courage. I cannot emphasize enough the value of taking advantage of worthy opportunities for growth and preparation as they come to you so that you may be in a position to take advantage of later opportunities. Had I not consented to participate in prior challenging tasks, I would not have been even remotely prepared to accept this amazing opportunity in Perth, Australia.

Faith, testimony, and accumulated good experiences are important for personal growth. You may wonder why you are called upon to do certain things. You, too, need to pray your way through requirements and opportunities. You may have opportunities placed before you

that require a great deal of courage and faith. My counsel is: It is worth whatever sacrifice is needed. Go ahead and accept that Church calling. If the Spirit confirms it, take advantage of that personal or professional opportunity. To grow we must reach, stretch, and take necessary risks. Let the Lord be your partner in all your righteous endeavors, and he will support and sustain you. And be of good faith and courage. Trust in the Lord, even in the face of opposition and trial. We never know the role of opposition in our development and growth.

Opposition

Opposition reminds me of a favorite parable that has influenced my life profoundly over the years. It will be an old friend to some of you and perhaps a new friend to others. This is Brother James E. Talmage speaking:

Sometimes I find myself under obligations of work requiring quiet and seclusion such as neither my comfortable office nor the cozy study at home insures. My favorite retreat is an upper room in the tower of a large building, well removed from the noise and confusion of the city streets. The room is somewhat difficult of access, and relatively secure against human intrusion. Therein I have spent many peaceful and busy hours with books and pens.

I am not always without visitors, however, especially in summertime; for, when I sit with windows open, flying insects occasionally find entrance and share the place with me. These self-invited guests are not unwelcome. Many a time I have laid down the pen, and, forgetful of my theme, have watched with interest the activities of these winged visitants, with an afterthought that the time so spent had not been wasted, for, is it not true, that even a butterfly, a beetle, or a bee, may be a bearer of lessons to the receptive student?

A wild bee from the neighboring hills once flew into the room; and at intervals during an hour or more I caught the pleasing hum of its flight. The little creature realized that it was a prisoner, yet all its efforts to find the exit through the partly opened

casement failed. When ready to close up the room and leave, I threw the window wide, and tried at first to guide and then to drive the bee to liberty and safety, knowing well that if left in the room it would die as other insects there entrapped had perished in the dry atmosphere of the enclosure. The more I tried to drive it out, the more determinedly did it oppose and resist my efforts. Its erstwhile peaceful hum developed into an angry roar; its darting flight became hostile and threatening.

Then it caught me off my guard and stung my hand—the hand that would have guided it to freedom. At last it alighted on a pendant attached to the ceiling, beyond my reach of help or injury. The sharp pain of its unkind sting aroused in me rather pity than anger. I knew the inevitable penalty of its mistaken opposition and defiance; and I had to leave the creature to its fate. Three days later I returned to the room and found the dried, lifeless body of the bee on the writing table. It had paid for its stubbornness with its life.

To the bee's short-sightedness and selfish misunderstanding I was a foe, a persistent persecutor, a mortal enemy bent on its destruction; while in truth I was its friend, offering it ransom of the life it had put in forfeit through its own error, striving to redeem it, in spite of itself, from the prison-house of death and restore it to the outer air of liberty.

*Are we so much wiser than the bee that no analogy lies between its unwise course and our lives? We are prone to contend, sometimes with vehemence and anger, against the adversity which after all may be the manifestation of superior wisdom and loving care, directed against our temporary comfort for our permanent blessing. In the tribulations and sufferings of mortality there is a divine ministry which only the godless soul can wholly fail to discern. . . . Disappointment, sorrow, and affliction may be the expression of an all-wise Father's kindness. Consider the lesson of the unwise bee! ["The Parable of the Unwise Bee," *The Parables of James E. Talmage*, comp. Albert L. Zobell, Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1973), pp. 29–31]*

How often do we fight against opposition and misjudge the trials of our lives? Might this not be a wise Father in Heaven or mentor, teacher, or friend trying to help guide us to freedom, success, and perhaps life itself? Again we need to exercise our faith and prayers:

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. [Proverbs 3:5–6]

I believe this scriptural counsel with all my heart. I also believe that there is wonderful power waiting behind us spiritually to help us to be successful. I hope I never forget the quote I saw one day on a bulletin board in the Provo Temple: “The power behind you is far stronger than any opposition before you.”

And, related to this, I believe another quote that was taught to me years ago: “Life is full of wonderful opportunities brilliantly disguised as insolvable problems.”

Friendly Support

There are amazing support systems and incredible people available and ready to help us solve our problems and to help us take advantage of our opportunities. Let’s consider a few resources on our BYU campus alone that serve us so well.

I think of Wayne Peterson of the Department of Physics and Astronomy who has devoted hours of his professional and personal life preparing wonderful visual examples of physics principles so that you and I can be taught by the physics faculty through visual and auditory means. This is very important to the learning styles of those many of us who appreciate more than the printed page.

Dr. Campbell Gray, Herman Du Toit, Ellen Powley, and other professionals associated with the BYU Museum of Art are devoting their time to provide inspiring and aesthetic experiences for us in the areas of the fine arts.

If you listen to their dreams for you, you will be amazed at the opportunities the museum provides now and will in the future. I hope you take advantage of these wonderful exhibits. The Masada and the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibits are there now.

You could hear similar altruistic objectives from Duane Smith and Doug Cox at the Monte L. Bean Life Science Museum. They are putting in a sesquicentennial exhibit so that we can focus on the animals the pioneers may have known. This will be another good exhibit to visit. I am sure similar encouraging goals have been established by others of the museums on campus. We have some great museums.

Amazing opportunities are made available to us in the Harris Fine Arts Center. Sometime back I came over to campus to attend a theatrical production and was aware that there were three drama productions, two major musical concerts, an art exhibit, and a TV telecast in the Harris Fine Arts Center simultaneously. There were three film showings and two dance productions taking place that evening elsewhere on campus. How often do we take advantage of the splendid cultural opportunities in our area?

Are we consciously aware of the amazing people and invaluable services being rendered in our behalf in the Administration Building? Admissions, Registration, Records, Financial Services, Employment, University Police, Graduation Evaluation, Academic Advisement, Scholarships, Purchasing, Travel Services, Benefits, School Relations, Job/Career Placement, Public Communications, and others are located in that building. All the people in these areas are working hard to be mentors and to provide support services for you.

The Ernest L. Wilkinson Center offers another amazing set of resources with the Bookstore, Dining Services, Multicultural Services, Scheduling, Student Service Association, Campus Craft, Cougar Creations, *Daily Universe* offices, barbershop, and post

office. I have sincerely appreciated Alex Hunter and the team at Catering and in the Skyroom, as well as the staff at the Games Center, ID Center, Information Center, Varsity Theatre, Outdoors Unlimited, Off-Campus Housing, and the Lost and Found.

The Harold B. Lee Library provides an amazing set of resources for us, too. There are more than 50 categories of services available. It has been my experience that each of these services are rendered with expertise and courtesy.

Under the capable leadership of Ron J. Clark, the wonderful people in Public Affairs and Guest Relations provide hospitality to special visitors, give campus tours, and correlate special events, commencement, the president's hosting activities, and the United Way. If you have not taken the campus tour, you are missing a real treat. When you have a guest on campus, schedule your time so you can go on the tour with them.

In the University Press Building are support staff who oversee all copy centers on campus, print 99 percent of the packets for classes and some of the textbooks, and in general take care of the university's printing needs. They are a great team.

We should be very grateful how Media Services enriches our lives and supports our learning. Films, videos, and tapes are delivered to our classrooms with efficiency and quiet service. I for one have appreciated Julie Cloward, Keven Williamson, Glenda Judy, Marlae Rindlisbacher, and others of their colleagues who have gone out of their way to help me with audiovisual needs over the years.

Most recently we have been developing a CD-ROM with an amazing team of gifted technicians under Curt Fawson's leadership at the Instructional Technology Center. This has been a wonderful new growing opportunity for me. I had no idea of the potential for CD-interactive learning packages. You, too, have access to this instructional technology to help you solve teaching and visual resource needs.

In our David O. McKay School of Education we have remarkable people in support services. Our Education Advisement Center personnel have been wise and wonderful over the years in helping students as they initiate and progress in their undergraduate academic programs. This is likely true across campus in the various advisement centers. I hope you take advantage of this capable assistance.

As faculty in the School of Education we have been blessed with wonderful resource people to help us in our scholarly productivity: Sharon Black, our very wise editor; Steve Burton, our knowledgeable CSR (Computing Support Representative); Dr. Adrian Van Mondfrans, who established the Undergraduate Research Trainees Program; Helen Hoopes in our Learning Resource Center; and Julie Cloward in our Media Services. I don't know what we would do without this team of specialists.

We could mention innumerable other colleges and services on this campus: for example, Don Kopp in Motor Pool or Lynn Sorenson and Russ Osguthorpe at the Faculty Center, professionals at the Alumni House, Harman Continuing Education Building, Health Center, Faculty Center, Snell Building, Clyde Building, Richards Building, Smith Fieldhouse, and many others—all providing a means of support in the fulfilling of our opportunities.

Wherever we live we need to identify and take advantage of the wonderful resources and the amazing people working in them. How many resources are available in your life to help you take advantage of your opportunities? And how strong is your faith to follow through with these opportunities?

Remember, the Lord has counseled us: "Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you" (D&C 68:6).

In closing, I'll read what Richard L. Evans wisely counseled:

That we shall move quickly or that we shall perform spectacularly is not of first importance—but that we shall move surely and safely from moment to moment, from hour to hour, and from day to day, is the procedure for all who would reach their highest possibilities, for after the portals of this life open and close behind us, we shall still have ourselves to live with, and our performance to account for.

[Richard L. Evans, “M.I.A. Theme,”

Improvement Era, September 1947, p. 604]

I pray that we may have sufficient faith in the Lord, courage of our convictions, self-discipline, and trust to take advantage of our opportunities as they come. May we appreciate and be humble enough to cooperate with the wonderful people around us who are available and willing to help us. May we take advantage of the opportunities of our lives in the lifetime of those opportunities is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.