

Are You Ready?

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Brothers and sisters, it is an honor to join you for today's devotional. In reality, speaking at a devotional is something I never could have imagined growing up in a small beach town in Southern California and later as an undergraduate at San Diego State, where I actually attended on a volleyball scholarship. That was a long, long time ago. That was before the internet, before texting, and before Instagram. Mobile phones couldn't be carried in a pocket. They looked more like bricks and cost about \$4,000 back then. You listened to music on record albums or cassette tapes. *Pong* was the most popular video game—you will have to look that up. BYU men's volleyball was still a club sport and couldn't offer scholarships, which is how I ended up in San Diego. However, when my eligibility was over, I still needed a few classes to graduate. By then I had met a beautiful BYU coed named Carol during the summer at a young single adult dance in Los Angeles. (So those dances do work. Don't avoid the dances!)

Since men's volleyball at BYU was still a club sport, they were playing many of the same schools that I had played against in San Diego. I contacted the coaching staff here in Provo, and they were supportive of my playing, which led to my transfer to BYU to play another year of volleyball, finish my degree, and try to seal the deal with Carol. It all worked out as well as I possibly could have hoped. I loved playing in the Smith Fieldhouse—there was such amazing crowd support, and there still is. It was fun. I enjoyed the classes that I took in order to graduate, and, best of all, I married Carol soon after the school year ended, about thirty-five years ago.

Shortly after the birth of our first child, we moved back to San Diego, where I spent my career and where we raised our family. Who could have guessed at that time that all four of our children—and, I have been reminded, a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law as well—would attend BYU? Three of our children have graduated, and our

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fourth is now in his second year, after having served in the Italy Rome Mission. Brigham Young University has had a tremendous impact on me and on my family, and I am grateful to be with you this morning. Thank you for having me.

Prepare the Way

As a lead-in to my remarks, let me begin by sharing just a bit of information regarding the role of the Presiding Bishopric, which is not often understood by members of the Church. As a reminder, we are those in the three little pictures at the bottom of the page of General Authorities listed in the *Ensign* general conference issues—below the pictures of the First Presidency, the members of the Twelve Apostles, and the members of the Seventy—with many wondering what it is we do.

The Presiding Bishopric of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood. Each of us is an ordained bishop, and we each hold keys associated with the Aaronic Priesthood, as taught in section 107 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which states: “The second priesthood is called the Priesthood of Aaron . . . and has power in administering outward ordinances. The bishopric is the presidency of this priesthood, and holds the keys or authority of the same. . . . The office of a bishop is in administering all temporal things.”¹ The temporal responsibility that is mentioned includes such “things” as the welfare and humanitarian work of the Church. President Russell M. Nelson spoke about this briefly in general conference. It includes the design, construction, and maintenance of temples (which also, thanks to President Nelson, keeps us very busy); responsibility for all Church finances and investments, including the for-profit businesses of the Church; and the publishing of all Church materials, such as scriptures and manuals, as well as what you see online. In all, fourteen Church departments report to the Presiding Bishopric. If you were to consolidate what we have been commissioned to do into one phrase, it would be “prepare the way.”

With our responsibility for the temporal affairs of the Church, along with every employee around the world who reports to us, we collectively

fulfill the role that John the Baptist filled when he exercised his Aaronic Priesthood keys and prepared the way for Jesus Christ. While John the Baptist prepared the way for the Savior during His mortal ministry,² our role is to prepare the way for the ecclesiastical and spiritual work of the Melchizedek Priesthood in preparation for the Second Coming of the Savior.

What I will address this morning has to do with a statement associated with the word *prepare* found in the well-known parable of the ten virgins. In the parable it is clear that all ten women were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom, but we learn that upon his arrival, only “*they that were ready* went in with him.”³ Not knowing beforehand when the bridegroom would arrive required all ten virgins to be prepared—and ready—for his arrival, whenever that would be. Unfortunately, five were not ready.⁴

“Are you ready?” is a question we respond to throughout our lives in some form or another. It could be anything from “Are you ready for your final exam?” to “Are you ready for your date?”

From a gospel perspective, there are a series of significant events for which we prepare, such as “Are you ready for an ordination?” “Are you ready for a temple recommend?” “Are you ready for a mission?” and “Are you ready to be sealed to an eternal companion?” On a day-to-day basis, we can ask ourselves if we are ready to pray or if we are ready to give service or perhaps give a blessing or respond to an impression.

As you know, President Nelson has frequently spoken of the importance of our duty to gather Israel. In the recently concluded general conference, he taught that “the gathering is an essential part of helping to *prepare the world and its people* for the Second Coming of the Lord.”⁵ When the prophet says, “Prepare the world and its people,” he is not speaking of a generic group—he is speaking about you and me, about each of us individually and collectively. In addition, that preparation is not exclusively for the day when the Savior returns—whenever that may be—but, rather, he is referring to the day on which each of us will have the opportunity to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ to account for our lives, whether

we cross the veil before He returns or whether we are still in mortality when that remarkable event takes place. Which of the virgins will we be? Will we be ready?

To be prepared, to respond to the question “Are you ready?” does not mean “Are you perfect?” Since this is not a contest with someone else, it surely does not mean “Are you better than your neighbor?” It is a matter of doing our best in preparing for whatever is next in our life—planned or unplanned—and relying on the Lord to make up the difference for whatever we lack. The Atonement of Jesus Christ—which is both infinite and individual—is designed to make up the difference. The adversary, on the other hand, will do everything possible and will put up every obstacle he can devise to hinder your progress and keep you from being ready. He wants to distract you. He wants to confuse you to keep you from fulfilling your divine destiny as an heir of exaltation.

Focus on the Essential

As a Presiding Bishopric, in order to prepare the way and respond positively to the question “Are you ready?” we always strive to apply one principle in particular: that is to focus on the essential. Significant effort is expended within the various departments of our stewardship to determine the difference between what is good and what is essential. Let me share a personal experience that taught me the importance of the difference between the two.

Early last year I had the opportunity to travel with Carol to Jerusalem for the first time on a Presiding Bishopric assignment. After a few days of meetings at the BYU Jerusalem Center, a day was available to visit the city and the sites associated with the life of the Savior. I have a degree in history, and I am fascinated with where significant historical events took place, trying to imagine in my mind what it must have been like in that specific location. We traveled with a wonderful, knowledgeable BYU professor, and I was thrilled as we approached the first site.

As we arrived at a certain location, the professor described how this was where a specific event

in the life of the Savior had occurred, and then he said something like “or somewhere nearby.” It caught me a bit off guard, as I wanted to know exactly where the event had taken place. I wanted to see the plaque in the ground stating that here is where the Savior blessed or healed or taught.

A bit disappointed, we moved on to the next site with continued anticipation. And you know what happened? I again heard the words “or somewhere nearby.” I began to be a bit irritated. When it happened a third time, I started to become annoyed. I didn’t say anything to the professor. But in an instant I received a strong correction from the Spirit. In my mind I clearly heard the words “Chris, stop it. Stop it now.” The Spirit had my attention and then continued: “It is not *where* it happened that is important. It is that it *happened*. Understand?”

This was an experience that I have not forgotten and that I have reflected upon numerous times since. It helped me understand that some things may be nice or even good to know or do, but there are other things that are absolutely *essential*, especially in our preparation to be ready.

The Savior taught the same principle when He dined with Martha and Mary. You remember the event. In Luke we read:

And a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word.

But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.

*And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art **careful and troubled** about many things:*

*But one thing is needful: and Mary hath **chosen** that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.⁶*

Just as the Savior distinguishes between good and needful, or essential, I am sure you can think of many things that may be essential for us in our preparation to be ready at any time. Let me share just three essentials—as taught by living prophets

and the scriptures—each of which will bless our lives as they are applied:

1. Temple worship
2. The Book of Mormon
3. Partaking of the sacrament

1. Temple Worship

Since his calling as prophet, seer, and revelator and president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President Nelson has taught both directly and indirectly regarding the importance of the temple and the sacred ordinances in which we participate and the sacred covenants we make. He has taught directly by what he has said and indirectly by the many temples he continues to announce. And that is not going to stop anytime soon. In the most recent general conference, he taught that “the crowning jewel of the Restoration is the holy temple. Its sacred ordinances and covenants are pivotal to preparing a people who are ready to welcome the Savior at His Second Coming.”⁷

In a world that is increasingly secular and spiritually confusing, the house of the Lord serves as an oasis in a spiritual desert. In His house we find peace and security from the distractions of the world as we are instructed regarding our relationship with our Father in Heaven and His Son Jesus Christ and regarding His eternal plan for the exaltation of His children. Each time we attend the temple—in all that we hear, in all that we do, and in all that we say; in every ordinance in which we participate; and in every covenant that we make—we are pointed to our Savior and Redeemer. As President Nelson explained, “The basis for every temple ordinance and covenant—the heart of the plan of salvation—is the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”⁸

Just as the Lord commanded Nephi to “arise, and get thee into the mountain”⁹—which was Nephi’s temple in the wilderness where the Lord would teach Nephi how to build a boat that would carry his family safely to the promised land—we too, through the ordinances and covenants of the temple, are taught in the temple what we must

know and what we must do to prepare ourselves to be brought into the presence of the Savior and complete a safe return to our celestial home.

We all understand that the Lord answers prayers and provides inspiration in a variety of venues. It could be as we pray at the side of our bed, as we study the scriptures, as we listen to a general conference talk, or in a variety of other settings, but the Lord has made it clear that there are “great things”¹⁰ reserved for those who are willing to pay the price and be worthy to “go up to the mountain of the Lord.”¹¹

Attending the temple as often as our circumstances allow—an individual decision between each of us and the Lord—increases our ability to learn and apply what we are taught in the temple. The great lessons of the temple will be written in our hearts and minds, and the associated blessings of temple attendance will be ours as we remember and keep the covenants we make.

President Nelson could not have been more clear about the role of the temple in our lives when he counseled:

*Our need to be in the temple on a regular basis has never been greater. . . . If you have reasonable access to a temple, I urge you to find a way to make an appointment regularly with the Lord—to be in His holy house—then keep that appointment with exactness and joy. I promise you that the Lord will bring the miracles He knows you need as you make sacrifices to serve and worship in His temples.*¹²

2. The Book of Mormon

In *Preach My Gospel*, a manual many of you are familiar with, or will become familiar with, we are taught that “an *essential* part of conversion is receiving a witness from the Holy Ghost that the Book of Mormon is true.”¹³

Reading the Book of Mormon, praying “with real intent”¹⁴ to know of its truth, and receiving a witness from the Holy Ghost of its divine origin is good, but maintaining that converting witness that impacts all we do and the decisions we make is *essential*. Speaking to members of the Church “established in the city of Zarahemla,”¹⁵ the

prophet Alma posed a question that is worthy of our individual consideration: “If ye have experienced a change of heart [which, by the way, is the definition of conversion], and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, *can ye feel so now?*”¹⁶

To “feel so now” requires more than an occasional, casual reading of the Book of Mormon. The world is in such a state that we need a constant renewal of the spiritual strength and converting power provided by the Book of Mormon, even if we have already experienced a change of heart.

Never has the great and spacious building described in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life been more crowded or the noise coming from its open windows more misguided, mocking, and confusing than in our day. In Lehi’s vision we read of two groups of people and their responses to the shouts from the building. In 1 Nephi 8 we read:

And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building. . . .

And it was filled with people . . . ; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come . . . and were partaking of the fruit.

*And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.*¹⁷

In verse 33 we read of others who had a different response to the scoffing and the mocking that were coming from the building. The prophet Lehi explained that those in the building “did point the finger of scorn at me and those that were *partaking* of the fruit also; but we heeded them not.”¹⁸

A key difference between those who were ashamed, fell away, and were lost and those who did not heed the mocking from the building and stood with the prophet is found in two phrases: first, “after they had *tasted*,” and, second, “those that were *partaking*.”

The first group had arrived at the tree and had stood for a time with the prophet, but they had

only *tasted* the fruit. Because they did not continue to eat the fruit, they allowed the taunting from the building to affect them, drawing them away into forbidden paths, where they were lost.

In contrast to those who had tasted but then wandered off were those who were found continuously *partaking* of the fruit. These individuals ignored the commotion from the building, stood by the prophet, and enjoyed the accompanying safety and peace. Frequent study of the Book of Mormon allows us to continually partake, keeping us spiritually safe and strengthening our commitment to the Lord and His servants. Failure to do so leaves us vulnerable to those who seek to impede our progress and destroy our peace.

Brothers and sisters, the adversary is real. He offers counterfeit solutions that may appear at times to provide answers but take us even further from the peace we seek. He offers a mirage that has the appearance of legitimacy and safety but that will, ultimately, like the great and spacious building, collapse, destroying all who seek shelter within its walls.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reminded us, “The Book of Mormon is an incomparable treasure and the instrument of conversion that the Lord has designed and provided for our dispensation.”¹⁹

Ultimately, it is not how many times we read the Book of Mormon cover to cover that is important but how we apply what we have studied in our pursuit to become more like our Savior. Since being converted to the Lord is a lifelong challenge, our study of the Book of Mormon must be a lifelong pursuit.

3. *Partaking of the Sacrament*

In the book of Moroni, we read, “And they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus.”²⁰ Modern scripture reaffirms that “it is expedient that the church meet together often to partake of bread and wine in the remembrance of the Lord Jesus.”²¹

The emphasis in each of these passages is not on the amount of time that we spend at church but rather on the primary purpose of our worship:

the partaking of the emblems of Christ’s sacrifice, which is, and must remain, the essential element and “sacred center” of the Sabbath.

Each Sunday we are able to have an experience similar to one shared by the survivors of the serious destruction that occurred at the time of the Savior’s crucifixion, as described in the Book of Mormon. After “descending out of heaven”²² and introducing Himself as “Jesus Christ, . . . the light and the life of the world,”²³ the Savior extended an invitation to the multitude, saying:

*Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.*²⁴

After approaching the Savior “one by one,” seeing and feeling for themselves that it truly “was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come,” the entire multitude “did cry out with one accord, saying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.”²⁵

Each Sabbath day, in every sacrament meeting, we have the privilege of symbolically taking into our hands the emblems of His death—reminders of His great atoning sacrifice, made for each of us.²⁶ We can, like those who saw and felt for themselves, shout within our hearts, “Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!” Participating in this sacred ordinance allows us to renew and to also make covenants, to be cleansed and to be sanctified by the Spirit, and to help us, as we are taught in the sacrament prayers on both the bread and the water, to “*always remember Him*,”²⁷ which will help us to *always be ready*.

As we do so, we will conclude our Sabbath observance at church not only with the ability and the determination to “*always remember Him*,” to “*keep his commandments*,” and to have the willingness to take His name upon us, but we will also have the greatest gift that God can bestow upon us in mortality: the ability to “*always have his Spirit*” as our constant companion.²⁸

The importance and essential nature of the gift of the Spirit becomes clear when listening to the words of President Nelson, who warned, “In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”²⁹

Knowing the world we would live in and the absolute need for the Spirit in our lives, our Father in Heaven provided a way for us to be cleansed and sanctified each week, making it possible to head back into the world clothed with the power and influence available only through the companionship of His Spirit.

There are some who may view the relatively few minutes it takes to participate in the ordinance of the sacrament as a small thing, discounting the power and significance of this ordinance instituted by the Savior Himself with this command: “*And this shall ye always observe to do.*”³⁰ As President Dallin H. Oaks taught regarding small and simple things:

*Though each of these practices may seem to be small and simple, over time they result in powerful spiritual uplift and growth. This occurs because each of these small and simple things invites the companionship of the Holy Ghost, the Testifier who enlightens us and guides us into truth.*³¹

The powerful spiritual uplift mentioned by President Oaks and associated with the companionship of the Holy Ghost makes it possible for us to accomplish more than we can on our own, whatever talents and abilities we may possess.

Trust in the Lord

In our efforts to prepare, in our efforts to be ready, we are provided a sweet assurance in Alma, in which we have been reminded that the Savior “has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance.”³² The results of our efforts to bring forth that fruit may be visible and demonstrated in our behavior, but the seeds of that fruit are typically planted in private, in the quiet moments of decision. More than what is seen in public, it is what we do in private—when no one but ourselves and

the Lord are aware of the thoughts we entertain and the decisions we make—that sets us apart from the world.

Just as with the servants in the parable of the talents, who were assigned their talents based upon their “several abilit[ies],”³³ the Lord will not ask more of us than we are capable of accomplishing. Thus, while you are here as a student at BYU and beyond, as you focus on the essential and trust the Lord, you will be ready! You will be prepared to take your place in a career and in a family and also to serve in His kingdom because you were prepared for this time in the history of creation to help gather Israel and prepare for the return of His Son, Jesus Christ. He trusts you. He will also stretch you, which is how we grow. However, in that stretching process, I testify that what Nephi declared is true: “I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.”³⁴

Brothers and sisters, I know that God lives. I know that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer. I know that Joseph Smith saw what he said he saw in that grove of trees and that President Russell M. Nelson is God’s authorized mouthpiece on the earth today and is indeed a prophet, seer, and revelator. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God’s kingdom on earth. I testify of these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. D&C 107:13–15, 68.

2. See Mark 1:3.

3. Matthew 25:10; emphasis added.

4. See Matthew 25:2.

5. Russell M. Nelson, “Witnesses, Aaronic Priesthood Quorums, and Young Women Classes,” *Ensign*, November 2019; emphasis added.

6. Luke 10:38–42; emphasis added.

7. Russell M. Nelson, “Closing Remarks,” *Ensign*, November 2019.

8. Russell M. Nelson, “Personal Preparation for Temple Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 2001.

9. 1 Nephi 17:7.

10. 1 Nephi 18:3.

11. 2 Nephi 12:3.

12. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, November 2018.

13. *PMG*, 103; emphasis added.

14. Moroni 10:4.

15. Alma 5:2.

16. Alma 5:26; emphasis added.

17. 1 Nephi 8:26–28.

18. 1 Nephi 8:33; emphasis added.

19. D. Todd Christofferson, “How to Study the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, October 2011.

20. Moroni 6:6.

21. D&C 20:75.

22. 3 Nephi 11:8.

23. 3 Nephi 11:10–11.

24. 3 Nephi 11:14.

25. 3 Nephi 11:15–17.

26. See D&C 20:77, 79.

27. D&C 20:77, 79; emphasis added.

28. D&C 20:77; see also verse 79.

29. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018.

30. 3 Nephi 18:6.

31. Dallin H. Oaks, “Small and Simple Things,” *Ensign*, May 2018.

32. Alma 12:15.

33. Matthew 25:15; see also verses 14–30.

34. 1 Nephi 3:7.