

My Age of Preparation

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Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, may I begin my remarks by thanking those who are responsible for extending the kindness of inviting me to occupy this podium this morning. I have sought and again ask for the blessing of the Lord that the things I have prepared will be edifying and beneficial to at least some persons who shall hear.

We should all be humbly grateful to the Lord for our having been permitted to come to the earth in this time. He has blessed this century with an incomparable number of comforts and conveniences and a knowledge and technological explosion of mind-boggling proportions. There have been, and there also are, some great spirits among us. Who knows the potential of anyone in my hearing?

Earlier in this phenomenal century, the historian and philosopher Will Durant produced a great series of volumes under the general title *The Story of Civilization*. Some of those volumes bear the individual title *The Age of*, etc., such as *The Age of Faith* and *The Age of Reason Begins*. From the perspective of the gospel and the Church, one might call this period the Age of Expansion, Growth, and Optimism. As one considers the many reports of our society and much that comes from the media, this period

might be called the Age of Skepticism or the Age of Greed or the Age of Crime and Violence or the Age of Filth or the Age of Ingratitude or, simply, the Age of Disrespect. Disrespect and irreverence lie at the root of so many, if not all, of this world's ills.

Fortunately there are some people—all over the world, no doubt—who live in such a way that none of those names are applicable to them, although they are surrounded by many others to whom the terms do apply.

Although we live in a world seemingly filled with such influences, encouraged and fostered by many powerful forces, you at this great university are about something infinitely better. As the prophet Isaiah recorded in the first chapter of his book, “Come now, and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18). On the surface one might think my inquiry has little relevance to the things I have said thus far, but upon deeper reflection the relevance should become apparent. I ask you, as I asked a former generation, “Why get what we call an education?”

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Perhaps more often than not, if one asked himself that question, his answer would consist of some vocational reason. Doubtless many others would justify their pursuits on cultural grounds. The first would see education principally as an economic instrument or as a means to an end; that is, as a means to some kind of job for making a living, as we say. The second would see education principally as an end in itself. They would seek knowledge or art or whatever for its own sake. Needless to say, experience justifies both of these reasons for pursuing an education; however, the instrumental and intrinsic values in these reasons for pursuing an education can hardly be adequate for the Latter-day Saint, whose perspective is not limited to this mortal scheme of things.

As I understand the gospel, which is our guide, there are two fundamental reasons for seeking an education: first, as a means of improving the self, the person; and second, as a means of preparing the self or person to be able to render greater service than he could otherwise render. One might pursue any academic discipline in the alphabetic gamut from accounting to zoology and find satisfaction in its instrumental and/or intrinsic value; but if somehow in the process he or she does not become a better person—not merely a better accountant or better zoologist, or whatever, but a better person—and become motivated to serve others, the so-called education has failed to generate its most important product. One might think of himself as an accountant or zoologist or anything in between, but he is first and foremost a self or person, and if he is to really succeed, the self or person or other persons must not be sacrificed for the sake of the accountant or the zoologist. Or, to approach the matter a little differently, in examining the question “Why get an education?” one might ask himself the larger question, “What is the purpose of life?” Certainly the answer to that

question has significance for the subordinate question “Why get an education?”

It seems to me that the answer to the question of the purpose of life for mortals was suggested most succinctly by the Lord when he described his own work, wherein he declared, “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Inasmuch as the Lord has performed his great atoning sacrifice to redeem mankind from the grave and from sin, no matter how inadequate or unworthy we might feel, it is now our work and glory to personally accept his gifts and do all we can for our posterity, our progenitors, and our fellowmen generally to help them accept the Lord’s beneficent gifts.

In that great declaration of the Lord regarding his work, he spoke both quantitatively and qualitatively. *Immortality* is a quantitative term, indicating that life will go on endlessly. *Eternal life* is a qualitative phrase, indicating the quality of life that the Lord makes available to those who will fully accept him and his gospel and endure faithfully to the end. There is nothing we can do, nor need to do, relative to the gift of immortality. The Lord has done all that needed to be done, and thus immortality or endless life is a free gift from him to all mankind. On the contrary, our work lies in the area of eternal life—that quality of life he has made available to mankind. But it is our work to accept it ourselves and do all we can to help our posterity, progenitors, and fellowmen prepare themselves to accept it also. So when we ask ourselves the question “What is the purpose of life?” we get an answer something like “the purpose of life is to prepare myself and to help my companion, our posterity, our progenitors, and fellowmen prepare themselves for eternal life, even exaltation.”

When the Lord was asked the question “Which is the great commandment in the law?” he responded by naming what we now know as the first and second great

commandments, after which he said, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (see Matthew 22:34–40).

As the Lord simplified the decalogue, or Ten Commandments—those upon which all of the law and the prophets hang—to the two great commandments, analogously I would like to suggest that our preparation for eternal life, to which education must be contributory, may be reduced to two great endeavors to which all others are instrumental. Those two endeavors in the scriptures are identified by the terms *intelligence* and *stewardship*. Therefore, irrespective of how much formal schooling one receives—consciously or unconsciously—whether he acknowledges it or fails to acknowledge it, he is engaged in these two comprehensive endeavors called in the scriptures intelligence and stewardship.

There is a natural tendency to associate the word *intelligence* with intellect. Therefore, one might assume that the endeavor suggested here by the term *intelligence* has to do with what we might call intellectual acumen, skill, or brilliance; or perhaps the acquisition of encyclopedic knowledge; or perhaps great artistic, scientific, or scholarly learning. Certainly there are revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants that exhort mankind to acquire these things, but not merely for the sake of themselves. The Lord is explicit in those revelations that the purpose of one’s acquiring those things is that he or she might be better prepared to build the kingdom of God. If the acquisition of those things we ordinarily think of as intellectual is not the principal intention of the word *intelligence*, as one of the two endeavors suggested, what is the principal intention or meaning of intelligence here?

In that oft-used phrase from the Doctrine and Covenants, “The glory of God is intelligence,” intelligence is described as “light and truth,” and we are there told that “light and truth forsake that evil one” (D&C 93:36–37). Therefore, intelligence is described not only as

light and truth but as a disposition to act (also see D&C 93:30). And whatever one’s disposition is to act, we conventionally think of as his character. If one’s disposition is to act well, or do what we call good things, he or she is what we call a good person—we think of him or her as having good character. If his or her disposition is to act badly, or do bad or evil things, we think of him or her as being a bad person or as having or being a bad character. Therefore, *intelligence* here seems to be an appropriate synonym for *character*—righteous character.

Furthermore, elsewhere in the Doctrine and Covenants we are told:

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come. [D&C 130:18–19]

It strikes me as significant that the phrase is not “knowledge or intelligence” but “knowledge and intelligence,” which suggests that the intention of the word *intelligence* is something other than “knowledge.” In light of our previous observation that intelligence means a disposition to act, or righteous character, we can see in the just-cited passage a larger and more comprehensive meaning than is immediately recognizable otherwise. For if we substitute the word *character* for the word *intelligence*, that beautiful scripture will then read, “And if a person gains more knowledge and *character* in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.” Seen in this way, the passage tells us explicitly that it is not only the knowledge that we take with us that is important and will give us an advantage in the eternal worlds, it is also the right disposition to act upon that knowledge or good character or intelligence that will give us an advantage.

After all, the devil has more knowledge than anyone who ever walked the earth while he was mortal, other than the Lord, and yet that knowledge is not worth a whit to him toward salvation for he is without intelligence, in its scriptural meaning; that is, he lacks the disposition to act righteously or in light and truth. He has great knowledge but is without good character. The development or acquisition of intelligence, or righteous character, is the first endeavor with which we are charged in our mortal preparation for eternal life.

King Benjamin of ancient America put it this way:

For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.

[Mosiah 3:19]

This necessarily includes submitting oneself to the reception of all of the sacred ordinances the Lord has prescribed for the blessing of humankind.

Alma the Younger spoke of this transformation in a person as his being “born again” (Alma 5:49), specifically asking the question of his hearers or readers, “Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?” (Alma 5:14).

Perhaps the supreme attribute that characterizes this endeavor we call character is most clearly identified in the scriptures as charity. In describing this quality, Mormon said, “Charity is the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47) and that it will be well with whoever is possessed of it at the last day. He urged mankind to seek

to be filled with this love, so that when the Lord shall appear we “shall be like him . . . ; that we may be purified even as he is pure” (Moroni 7:48).

Here again the Lord Jesus Christ is our example. It is recorded that when he was in Palestine, he made several such declarations as “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). He was the Creator, the mighty Jehovah, and yet his great power was not the product of pride or rebellion but the product of the submission of his own will to the will of Heavenly Father. Because of his having submitted his own will to that of the Father completely, without boasting but in humility and utter honesty, when he asked his disciples of ancient America the question “What manner of men ought ye to be?” he was able to say, “Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27). Thus, in following the example of the Lord, by submitting our own wills to his will—the will of the Father—that wonderful transformation called a rebirth will occur in which we will be literally born of the Spirit, spiritually born of God. We will be filled with that divine love called charity—the pure love of Christ—that love which cleaveth unto light and truth, which is intelligence, that disposition to act righteously in all things, even what we might call “celestial character.” Thus our first endeavor in our preparation for eternal life is to seek to develop and acquire celestial character.

Earlier I observed that, as I see it, the second great endeavor to which our preparation for eternal life might be reduced is stewardship. Fundamentally, that means that each person is a steward and has a stewardship. The generic meaning of *steward* is “one who acts as a supervisor or administrator, as of finances and property, for another or others.” Some persons in their pride of self, pride of position, or pride of possessions might resent being thought of as stewards, but nonetheless we are

all stewards. If one pauses to consider what he brings into this life with him and what he takes when he leaves, he will be brought to a keen awareness of how temporary his so-called possessions and positions are. Several years ago some wealthy wit declared, "If I can't take it with me, I'm not going." But we are all going, and the material things of this world will not go with us.

We are stewards of our lives—the years of mortality we have; stewards of our minds—how we use our intellects; stewards of our talents—what we do with them; stewards of our energy—what we do with it; stewards as husbands or wives—what we make of those relationships; stewards over our families—the influence we exercise upon them; stewards in our occupations—responsible for what we do with our opportunities, responsible for whatever influence we may exercise upon others; and stewards over our so-called possessions—what we do with them and the purposes to which we use them. In short, our lives constitute vast complexes of stewardships, opportunities to manage a host of affairs. Doubtless the reason Jesus on several occasions spoke of the difficulty of the rich man's entering the kingdom of heaven is because of the magnitude of his earthly stewardship and his responsibility to use his riches for wise and righteous purposes. But, as I have indicated, it is not only the rich man who is a steward. Every human being is a steward entrusted with what we call his own life and all of the personal, family, social, religious, political, economic, and other relationships in which he finds himself.

Basically, what is our responsibility as stewards? Earlier we discovered that the answer to the question "What is the purpose of life?" or "What is our work?" was found by examining the Lord's statement concerning his work. Likewise, in this case, in order to determine our responsibility as stewards, let us reverently ask the question "What do gods do?" As we

think of Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, and what they do—as revealed in the revelations they have given mankind—and as we contemplate our prayers and other communications with them, perhaps there is no better way to summarily describe what they do than to say simply, they bless. However else their work might be itemized, detailed, or listed, fundamentally, their great powers are used to bless mankind.

With the example of our Celestial Sire, our Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost, we are now able to answer the question "What is our responsibility as stewards?" Essentially, as stewards of all the circumstances and things entrusted to us, as previously described, it is our responsibility to so administer, manage, and use these things that we bless the lives of all with whom we associate. Certainly that is the sense of King Benjamin's declaration "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). We should not confuse serving with exploiting, profiteering, preying upon, taking advantage of, etc. We are to serve one another. The Lord said, "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). He also said, "Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all" (Mark 10:43–44). Obviously, greatness is equated with service.

In the first 12 verses of Luke 16 is recorded the Lord's parable about the unjust steward. At the end of the parable the Lord gives counsel and asks two penetrating questions. In the first he counsels mankind to use their worldly wealth (earthly possessions) in such a way while they have it here in mortality that when they no longer have it in the eternal worlds they still will be benefited by the wise and righteous use they made of it when they did have it. Or, to put it differently, he counseled mankind to use their earthly riches while they have them in such a way that they will pay

dividends in the eternal worlds. After this counsel, he then asked this question: “If . . . ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon [worldly wealth], who will commit to your trust the true riches?” (Luke 16:11). Then he asked the core question: “And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?” (Luke 16:12). That is, if we are not faithful stewards in managing or administering the things that belong to the Lord that are entrusted to us as mortals, surely we should not expect the time to come when the Lord would give us things to be our own. (See D&C 72:3–4 and D&C 104:13.) Therefore, our second endeavor in our preparation for eternal life is to be faithful stewards in managing all of the things entrusted to us as mortals by the Lord.

In this day the Lord has revealed a singular criterion to assist us in our pursuit of the two great endeavors—character and stewardship—in our preparation for eternal life. Of course, the gospel is called by the Lord in modern revelation the “new and everlasting covenant.” In section 45 of the Doctrine and Covenants, he declared, “I have sent mine everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people” (D&C 45:9). In that statement the Lord makes a very significant distinction. The gospel is a light to the world, but to those who have made covenants with the Lord it must be a standard. For the covenant people the gospel is more than a light, as important as that is. It is a standard, and a standard is that which we use to measure other things. Therefore, for the covenant people the gospel is the standard by which all other things are measured. The gospel is not measured by other things, but all things are measured by the gospel—the new and everlasting covenant. That is a fundamental criterion in the effort to develop and acquire

celestial character and manage and administer all of our affairs as faithful stewards.

Now let us return to our original question: “Why get an education?” I hope that the answer now emerges very clearly as similar to the answer to the other question: “What is the purpose of life?” As rich and full as we can make it, I see mortal life as essentially the preparation of ourselves and others for eternal life. And that preparation consists fundamentally of two endeavors: the development and acquisition of celestial character, and faithful stewardship of all things entrusted to us. Analogously, the purpose of an education—the formal kind sought in the school, college, and university, as well as the informal kind that we should pursue throughout our mortal lives—is twofold: to do all we can to make of ourselves better persons, and to continuously do all we can to prepare ourselves to serve others better and to continuously serve them better.

At the outset we mentioned several of many possible ways in which this period of time might be characterized or described. Obviously, we hope none of the negative ones is applicable to anyone here. As we contemplate the larger question of the purpose of life—and the more immediate but subordinate question “Why get an education?”—it emerges very clearly that, however the age might be described for others, for one who is aware of the thoughts considered here, this for him or her is “My Age of Preparation.” May we consciously strive to improve daily in our pursuit of celestial character and be more consciously aware of the great complex of things within the scope of our individual stewardships as we anticipate having to give an account of them, and may we ever be aware that for each of us this is My Age of Preparation, I humbly pray, in the holy name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.