

## President Thomas S. Monson

### Consider God's expectations

A few months ago I stood before a capacity audience in the Marriott Center on the campus of Brigham Young University. Mine was the responsibility to speak, to lift, to motivate, to inspire. There came to my mind the realization that here were men and women of promise. They represented the hopes, the dreams, and the aspirations of parents, of family, of teachers, of God. All were participants in the passing parade of mortality. Some were gifted in the arts, others leaned toward the humanities, while some found their talents prompted a study of the natural or physical sciences. These students stood on the stage of study. Soon they would disperse to make their marks in life, to fulfill the measure of their creation, and to learn from their own lives those lessons which would prepare them for the exaltation they seek.

My thoughts turned to others striving to become master craftsmen through apprenticeship and experience. Then I reflected on that vast throng who had abandoned preparation, formed undesirable friendships, and adopted habits and practices which diverted them from that pathway which leads to perfection and enticed them along one of the many detours where sorrow, discouragement, and destruction await.

The wayward son, the willful daughter, the pouting husband, the nagging wife—all can change. There can occur a parting of the clouds, a break in the storm. Maturity comes, friendships alter, circumstances vary. "Cast in concrete" need not describe human behavior.

From the perspective of eternity, our sojourn in this life is ever so brief. Detours are costly; they must be shunned. The spiritual nature within us should not be dominated by the physical. It behooves each of us to remember who he or she is and what God expects him or her to become.

### Trust God's guidance

The poet Wordsworth, in his inspired *Intimations of Immortality*, inclined our thoughts to that heavenly home from whence each of us came:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The soul that rises with us, our  
life's star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we  
come  
From God, who is our home.*  
("Ode: Intimations of Immortality  
from Recollections of Early  
Childhood," lines 58-65)

In finding and trailing this spiritual contact with the infinite, we will feel the touch of inspiration and know that God will guide us as we put in Him our trust. That wise and righteous man, Job, declared the profound truth: "There is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth . . . understanding" (Job 32:8). It is this inspiration which we at times allow to grow dim, causing us to wander far below the level of our possibilities.

### Love can work wonders

During the Great Depression, the homeless, the downtrodden, the unemployed "rode the rails" that passed not far from our home. On numerous occasions, there would be a soft knock on the back door. When I opened the door, there I would see a man, sometimes two, ill-clothed, ill-fed, ill-schooled. Generally, such a visitor held in his hand the familiar cap. His hair would be tousled, his face unshaven. The question was always the same: "Could you spare some food?" My dear mother invariably responded with a pleasant,

"Come in and sit down at the table." She would then prepare a ham sandwich, cut a piece of cake, and pour a glass of milk. Mother would ask the visitor about his home, his family, his life. She provided hope and words of encouragement. Before leaving, the visitor would pause to express a gracious thank-you. I would note that a smile of content had replaced a look of despair. Eyes that were dull now shone with new purpose. Love, that noblest attribute of the human soul, can work wonders.

### Everyone faces challenges and failures

In our journey on earth, we discover that life is made up of challenges—they just differ from one person to another. We are success oriented, striving to become "wonder women" and "super men." Any intimation of failure can cause panic, even despair. Who among us cannot remember moments of failure?

One such moment came to me as a young basketball player. The game was close—hotly contested—when the coach called me from the bench to run a key play. For some reason which I shall never understand, I took the pass and dribbled the ball right through the opposing team. I jumped high toward the basket; and, as the basketball left my fingertips, I came to the abrupt realization that I was shooting for the wrong basket. I offered the shortest prayer I have ever spoken: "Dear Father, don't let that ball go in." My prayer was answered, but my ordeal was just beginning. I heard a loud cheer erupt from the adoring fans: "We want Monson, we want Monson, we want Monson . . . OUT!" The coach obliged.

Not long ago I read about an incident that occurred in the life of President Harry S. Truman after he had retired and was back in Independence, Missouri. "He was at Truman Library, talking with some elementary school students, and answering their questions.

Finally, a question came from an owl-like little boy. 'Mr. President,' he said, 'was you popular when you was a boy?' The President looked at the boy, and answered, 'Why, no. I was never popular. The popular boys were the ones who were good at games and had big tight fists. I was never like that. Without my glasses, I was blind as a bat, and to tell the truth, I was kind of a sissy.' . . . The little boy started to applaud and then everyone else did, too" (Eugene W. Brice, "Good News about Failure," *Vital Speeches*, 1 Feb. 1983, p. 236).

### Rise from failure to achievement

Our responsibility is to rise from mediocrity to competence, from failure to achievement. Our task is to become our best selves. One of God's greatest gifts to us is the joy of trying again, for no failure ever need be final. In 1902, the poetry editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* returned a sheaf of poems to a 28-year-old poet with this curt note: "Our magazine has no room for your vigorous verse." The poet was Robert Frost. In 1894, the rhetoric teacher at Harrow in England wrote on a sixteen-year-old's report card, "A conspicuous lack of success." The sixteen-year-old was Winston Churchill.

President Theodore Roosevelt said, "It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena" (Clifton Fadiman, ed., *The American Treasury: 1455-1955*, [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955], p. 689).

### The gospel can change lives

We know men and women can change—and change for the better. No more vivid example is recorded than the life of Saul of Tarsus. The sacred record reveals that Saul threatened the disciples of the Lord. Then came that light from heaven and the voice saying unto him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

"And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" (Acts 9:4-5).

Saul's answer is a model for each of us: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (v. 6). Saul the persecutor became Paul the proselyter. Night had turned to day. Darkness had yielded to light.

Simon Peter, that fisherman who left his nets and followed the Lord, had his time of struggle. He had been weak and fearful and had denied his Lord with an oath. Then there came change. Never again would he deny or desert his Lord. He found his place in the kingdom of God.

We have the example of Alma the Younger, who turned his back on sinful practices and wasteful ways. Conversion came. He became an exponent of truth. His tender words of counsel to his sons Helaman and Corianton are literary classics. To Helaman: "O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God" (Alma 37:35). To Corianton: "Suffer not yourself to be led away by any vain or foolish thing" (Alma 39:11).

Then and now, as President David O. McKay so consistently taught, the gospel of Jesus Christ can make bad men good and good men better, can alter human nature and change human lives.

### Invitation to "come back"

Change for the better can come to all. In December of 1985 the First Presidency proclaimed "An Invitation to Come Back." To the inactive, the critical, the transgressor, the message declared: "'Come back. Come back and feast at the table of the Lord, and taste again the sweet and satisfying fruits of fellowship with the Saints'" (*Ensign*, Mar. 1986, p. 88). Hundreds, if not thousands, have responded to this invitation. Their lives have taken on new meaning. Their families have been blessed. They have drawn closer to God.

### John Helander's determination

In the private sanctuary of one's own conscience lies that spirit, that determination to cast off the old person and to measure up to the stature of true potential. But the way is rugged, and the course is strenuous. So discovered John Helander from Goteborg, Sweden. John is twenty-six years of age and is handicapped, in that it is difficult for him to coordinate his motions.

At a youth conference in Kungsbacka, Sweden, John took part in a 1500-meter running race. He had no chance to win. Rather, his was the opportunity to be humiliated, mocked, derided, scorned. Perhaps John remembered another who lived long ago and far away. Wasn't He mocked? Wasn't He derided? Wasn't He scorned? But He prevailed. He won His race. Maybe John could win his.

What a race it was! Struggling, surging, pressing, the runners bolted far beyond John. There was wonderment among the spectators. Who is this runner who lags so far behind? The participants on their second lap of this two-lap race passed John while he was but halfway through the first lap. Tension mounted as the runners pressed toward the tape. Who would win? Who would place second? Then came the final burst of speed; the tape was broken. The crowd cheered; the winner was proclaimed.

The race was over—or was it? Who is this contestant who continues to run when the race is ended? He crosses the finish line on but his first lap. Doesn't the foolish lad know he has lost? Ever onward he struggles, the only participant now on the track. This is his race. This must be his victory. No one among the vast throng of spectators leaves. Every eye is on this valiant runner. He makes the final turn and moves toward the finish line. There is awe; there is admiration. Every spectator sees himself running his own race of life. As John approaches the finish line, the audience, as one, rises to its feet. There is a loud applause of acclaim.

Stumbling, falling, exhausted but victorious, John Helander breaks the newly tightened tape. (Officials are human beings, too.) The cheering echoes for miles. And just maybe, if the ear is carefully attuned, that Great Scorekeeper—even the Lord—can be heard to say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

### Shed thoughts of failure

Each of us is a runner in the race of life. Comforting is the fact that there are many runners. Reassuring is the knowledge that our eternal Scorekeeper is understanding. Challenging is the truth that each must run. But you and I do not run alone. That vast audience of family, friends, and leaders will cheer our courage, will applaud our determination as we rise from our stumblings and pursue our goal. The race of life is not for sprinters running on a level track. The course is marked by pitfalls and checkered with obstacles. We take confidence from the hymn:

*Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be  
not dismayed,  
For I am thy God and will still  
give thee aid.  
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and  
cause thee to stand,  
Upheld by my righteous, . . .  
omnipotent hand. . . .*

*The soul that on Jesus hath leaned  
for repose*

*I will not, I cannot, desert to his  
foes;  
That soul, though all hell should  
endeavor to shake,  
I'll never, no never, no never  
forsake!*  
 (“How Firm a Foundation,” *Hymns*  
[1985], no. 85).

Let us shed any thought of failure. Let us discard any habit that may hinder. Let us seek; let us obtain the prize prepared for all, even exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God. This is my earnest prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Hinckley

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has been our concluding speaker.

The choir will sing in closing, “God’s Daily Care,” following which Elder Ronald E. Poelman of the First Quorum of the Seventy will offer the benediction. This conference will then be adjourned until two o’clock this afternoon.

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## SECOND DAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 157th Annual General Conference commenced at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, April 5, 1987. President Ezra Taft Benson presided, and President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir, directed by Jerold Ottley with Robert Cundick at the organ.

President Monson made the following remarks at the outset of the meeting.