



BEGINNINGS

President James E. Faust

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

CES Fireside for Young Adults • May 7, 2006 • University of Utah Institute of Religion

Thank you, President Price, for those kind remarks. President Hugh B. Brown once told me, “It’s all right to hear these nice things about you, as long as you don’t inhale.”

I took a fall four weeks ago tonight. I am getting over it; I still have to be a little careful about moving. I bring to you the love and the greetings of President Gordon B. Hinckley and President Thomas S. Monson. President Hinckley is doing just fine, just fine. In my opinion he couldn’t be doing better than he is. Of course, it is just remarkable how bright and able and sharp he is.

I’m not going to speak long tonight. I would rather give you young people an opportunity to socialize, and I encourage you to do so. We will make a special dispensation tonight, and that is when you say good-bye to each other at the end of the evening, you can shake hands. I see a lot of very lovely young ladies and handsome young men, and I would say to the young men, “Open your eyes!” And I’ll say further to the young men: “If you provide the works, I’ll provide the faith.”

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you students and companions tonight on this satellite broadcast. It is also a pleasure to greet the members of the institute faculty and your leaders, many of whom I have been privileged to know for many years.

I should like to take as a text for my remarks part of Paul’s message to the Thessalonians: “Beloved of the Lord, . . . God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Here Paul says you were chosen from the beginning. There are many beginnings. Some of you are beginning your important educational career. How you start and where you are going is of transcending importance. Paul said you were chosen to salvation “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Let us speak further of beginnings.

The Start

This may be a beginning for you tonight.

As a young man I used to run races in competition in high school and later at university. We used to train diligently for the race. We would stretch ourselves by running farther than the distance we were going to race. We would watch our diets. We would do a myriad of things to prepare ourselves for our track meets. And in the sprints, the start was particularly important. We would measure carefully our stance—and then check it again before we ever put our starting blocks into position. We would pound the starting blocks into the cinders, get into starting position, and go up and down a time or two to get the feel. We would actually make two or three practice starts. We knew that if we did not prepare and get a good start, we could not hope to finish in front. The Apostle Paul gave us this insightful admonition: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (1 Corinthians 9:24). Well, of course, the prize is eternal life.

I have found that in accomplishing just about anything, the most difficult part is getting started. A wise man has said, “He has half the deed done, who has made a beginning.”¹ My father was a lawyer and a judge. When I began to practice law, he cautioned me: “Get the pleadings straight in the beginning. If the pleadings are right, the whole case will flow along much smoother.”

New Beginnings

I am grateful for all new beginnings. Every hour can be a new beginning. Every day can be a new beginning. Every month can be a new beginning. Every year can be a new beginning. Indeed, every moment can be an opportunity to improve.

Dale Carnegie gave us this good advice: “Don’t be afraid to give your best to what seemingly are small jobs. Every time you conquer one it makes you that

much stronger. If you do the little jobs well, the big ones will tend to take care of themselves.”

New Opportunities

During the past few years there have been mergers of big companies, bankruptcies, and public scandals in the business world. Here in the United States we endured the terrible events of September 11 and its aftereffects. We have had floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other disasters worldwide. It has been a time for caution and reserve. Yet for those who have been bold enough, innovative enough, creative enough, and wise enough, there have been as many opportunities as ever. Out of every tragedy comes an opportunity. When Thomas Edison’s laboratory burned down, he immediately began the next day building a better one.

In Leicester, England, there is an inscription on the outside wall of an old church that bears a remarkably fine thought. The inscription reads: “In the year 1653 when all things sacred were throughout this nation either demolished or profaned, Sir Robert Shirley Baronet founded this church. Whose singular praise it is to have done the best things in the worst times, and hoped them in the most calamitous.”²

Sometimes as we face new beginnings, it becomes necessary to change or readjust our course when a goal or choice we had in mind is not available to us. For instance, you may not be accepted to the school you always wanted to attend or the door is closed to the career path you wanted to pursue or a special person in your life chooses to marry someone else. At such times it is important to realize that other choices are available to you and new beginnings are possible. Surely, as one door closes, another door opens.

Some young friends of ours learned the asphalt paving business by working for a large paving company for several years. It appeared that the opportunities for management and ownership would not become available within that company, so they decided they would start their own company. Of course there were great obstacles. One was limited capital. They would have to borrow money to provide for the deficit in their operating capital. They would also have to make enough in the way of a profit to service the interest on the borrowed money. They sought the advice of an uncle who had been a successful businessman, and he

told them: “This is the time. There will never be a better time. My counsel to you is to make your move.” They made their move, and by carefully and cautiously husbanding their limited capital, they were able to start the business and have a very successful first year.

My dear young friends, 2006 and every year is a year for new opportunities. Charles Dickens laid the foundation for his book *A Tale of Two Cities* with the following introduction: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us.”

The Courage to Change

Nothing is static. Everything changes. We need the courage to make necessary changes in our lives. The thoughtful philosopher Bruce Barton suggested: “Action and reaction, ebb and flow, trial and error, change—this is the rhythm of living. Out of our over-confidence, fear; out of our fear, clearer vision, fresh hope. And out of hope, progress.”³

For those who can adapt, who can bend, who can modify, who can improve, lies great opportunity. Sometimes we need to have the strength not to take counsel from our fears. This takes courage.

Nehru, the great leader of India, said: “Nothing in the world that is alive remains unchanging. All Nature changes from day to day and minute to minute, only the dead stop growing and are quiescent. Fresh water runs on, and if you stop it, it becomes stagnant. So also is it with the life of man [and of a woman] and the life of a nation.”⁴

New Spiritual Beginnings

Since the spirit is the most important essence of all human activity, it is tremendously important that we have frequent and regular spiritual renewals. It should happen to us weekly as we partake of the sacrament. Each week gives to us new opportunities to improve, to learn, and to make new friends. We might take advantage of new challenges for missionary work among our friends and neighbors. Every day gives us a new opportunity to study the scriptures.

May I suggest six beginning, essential measures that will greatly clear the channel for a daily flow of "living water" from the very source of the spring, even the Savior Himself.

1. *Have daily communication involving prayer.* A fervent, sincere prayer is a two-way communication that will do much to bring His Spirit flowing like healing water to help with the trials, hardships, aches, and pains we all face. What is the quality of our secret prayers when only He listens? As we pray, we should think of Him as being close by; full of knowledge, understanding, love, and compassion; the essence of power; and having great expectations of each of us.

2. *Give daily selfless service to another.* The followers of the divine Christ have to be weighed on the scales of what their actions are rather than the solemn professions of belief. The true measure of service is found in Matthew: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . , ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). Those who think about others more than they think about themselves and do kind acts of service are always the happiest of people. Indeed, as a wise man once observed, "The man who lives by himself and for himself is likely to be corrupted by the company he keeps."⁵

3. *Strive for daily increased obedience and perfection in our lives.* This means we have to consciously strive every day to keep God's commandments. This means watching our thoughts and actions and on a daily basis "trying to be like Jesus," as the Primary song says.⁶ Because of the perfect Atonement of Jesus, just men may be made perfect (see D&C 76:69). As Jesus Himself counseled: "What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27).

4. *Offer a daily acknowledgment of His divinity.* To have a daily, personal relationship with the Master, we must be His disciples and acknowledge His importance in our lives. As King Benjamin reminded us, "For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?" (Mosiah 5:13).

5. *Engage in daily study of the scriptures.* This requires some planning and discipline, but daily scripture study will strengthen our faith and help us live the gospel more fully. President Spencer W. Kimball has said: "I find that when I get casual in my

relationships with divinity and when it seems that no divine ear is listening and no divine voice is speaking, that I am far, far away. If I immerse myself in the scriptures, the distance narrows and the spirituality returns."⁷

6. *Do something.* Television has made of us a nation of spectators. The best athletic contests in the world come into our home free of charge. The finest music is available to us on the public broadcasting stations. We can hear Itzak Perlman play the violin. We can hear the great tenor, Pavarotti, sing the favorites of Caruso: "Torna a Surriento," "La donna e mobile," "Questa o quella," and watch him as they are staged. Being spectators, however, requires little or no effort on our part. As the Apostle James said, we need to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

I fear we have become a generation of critics. I am inclined to be more charitable with those who try even if they stumble than with those who will not try at all. Theodore Roosevelt said this about critics and doers: "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."⁸

I have spent a lifetime making my living in an arena where I was not shadowboxing with life's problems. I have learned from this experience that life is fuller and richer and better for those who are not afraid to make a new beginning. My experience has also been that genius is very rare, that most of life's rich rewards come to those who prepare carefully. Preparation and staying power are more valuable than brilliance. Herbert George Wells insightfully remarked, "The past is but the beginning of a beginning, and all that is and has been is but the twilight of the dawn."⁹

Some time ago I attended a stake conference. Before the other meetings of the conference began, I had a private meeting with the stake president,

who wanted to discuss a problem he was having with one of his high councilors. Some 10 years ago this high councilor had been involved in a grave sin, the penalty for which should have been excommunication. The high councilor had never made a confession. Short of making a confession and being willing to accept the punishment that would follow, however, the high councilor had done all in his power to rectify the matter and live so as to enjoy the blessings of the Church. The stake president did not learn of the transgression from the high councilor but from a collateral source who swore the stake president to secrecy. The stake president felt obliged to respect the confidence.

In a public meeting where the high councilor was present, the stake president spoke concerning repentance. He was really directing his remarks to one person—that high councilor—pleading and urging that he come forward voluntarily, make a confession, and begin the road to repentance.

My heart ached for the high councilor because had he come forward when the incident first occurred, it would by this time have been possible for him to have the whole matter put to rest. He could have had a new beginning. But without his confession and willingness to accept the punishment, there could be no new beginning. Surely repentance is one of the great principles of the gospel. No one is perfect, and we all need to invoke this principle from time to time. For those who have been involved in serious transgressions, however, it is a life-saving principle. The longer we go down the wrong road, the harder it is to come back and get on the right road.

I wish to express my appreciation for the redeeming principles of the sweet gospel of Jesus Christ. The principles taught by Jesus are available to all of us. As we live these principles, we will have a sure witness of the divinity of this holy work. I believe, as Paul said, you are beloved of the Lord and that from the beginning you were indeed chosen to salvation (see 2 Thessalonians 2:13). As Alma instructed, we have holy callings “prepared from the foundation of the world” (Alma 13:5). These include missionary service, motherhood, fatherhood, and service in the Church.

It is now my privilege and blessing to leave you my witness and blessing. I do so as one of the special witnesses, declaring to you with all of the conviction of my being and every cell of my body, from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, that Jesus is the Christ and the Redeemer of the world and our Savior, the head of this Church. I know that He is close to the leadership of this Church. I know that His Spirit is available to all of us individually and in our callings. He lives. There is no question about that. I can testify with the same conviction and sureness as the brother of Jared. As he saw the finger of God, it is written, he believed no more, for he knew (see Ether 3:6, 19).

I know, and I testify in the words of Peter. When some of the Saints began to fall away and the Savior became discouraged and said to the Twelve, “Will ye also go away?” Peter replied: “To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:67–69). By and through that same authority, I testify concerning His divinity and His being. I know this with a certainty that exceeds the knowledge that comes through our visual senses, for it is given to us by the Spirit to know with greater certainty than by our physical senses.

I would like to invoke upon each of you an apostolic blessing, you wonderful young people, you people of promise, and I pray that you will prepare yourselves for your great destiny, that you will stay close to the principles of righteousness and truth, and that you will be guided by the Holy Spirit with the promise you know of the Holy Ghost, that by and through that power you shall know the truth of all things. What greater promise to a student than that—to enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost? I invoke that blessing upon you and pray that our Heavenly Father will watch over you in all of your comings and goings and guide your footsteps in paths of truth and righteousness, that you will be wise beyond your years, and that you will be sensitive to your great destiny and your great promise. I leave this testimony with you and invoke these blessings upon you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Horace, *Epistles*, book I, epistle ii, line 40.
2. Inscription over the west door of The Church of the Holy Trinity in Staunton Harold Chapel Leicestershire, England; see www.boultonbee.freemasonry.co.uk/bfh/shc.htm.
3. In *The International Dictionary of Thoughts* (1969), 117.
4. Jawaharlal Nehru, in *International Dictionary of Thoughts*, 118.
5. Charles Henry Parkhurst, in *International Dictionary of Thoughts*, 659.
6. "I'm Trying to Be like Jesus," *Children's Songbook*, 78.
7. "What I Hope You Will Teach My Grandchildren" (address to seminary and institute personnel, Brigham Young University, July 11, 1966), 6; see also *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 135.
8. Address at the Sorbonne, Paris, France, Apr. 23, 1910, in "Citizenship in a Republic," chap. 21 of *The Strenuous Life*, vol. 13 of *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt* (national ed., 1926), 510.
9. *The Discovery of the Future* (1901).