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We Will Prove Them Herewith

(Abraham 3:25)

Now is the time to prepare and prove ourselves willing and able to do all things whatsoever the Lord our God shall command us.

I pray for the assistance of the Holy Ghost for all of us as I share the thoughts and feelings that have come to my mind and heart in preparation for this general conference.

The Importance of Tests

For more than two decades before my call to full-time Church service,

I worked as a university teacher and administrator. My primary responsibility as a teacher was to help students learn how to learn for themselves. And a vital element of my work was creating, grading, and providing feedback about student performance on tests. As you may already know from personal experience, tests typically are

not the part of the learning process that students like the most!

But periodic tests absolutely are essential to learning. An effective test helps us to compare what we need to know with what we actually know about a specific subject; it also provides a standard against which we can evaluate our learning and development.

Likewise, tests in the school of mortality are a vital element of our eternal progression. Interestingly, however, the word *test* is not found even one time in the scriptural text of the standard works in English. Rather, words such as *prove*, *examine*, and *try* are used to describe various patterns of demonstrating appropriately our spiritual knowledge about, understanding of, and devotion to our Heavenly Father's eternal plan of happiness and our capacity to seek for the blessings of the Savior's Atonement.

He who authored the plan of salvation described the very purpose of our mortal probation using the words *prove*, *examine*, and *try* in ancient and modern scripture. "And we will *prove* them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them."¹

Consider this pleading by the Psalmist David:

"Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.

"For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth."²

And the Lord declared in 1833, "Therefore, be not afraid of your enemies, for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will *prove* you in all things, whether you will abide in my covenant, even unto death, that you may be found worthy."³



Provo, Utah, USA



Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Present-Day Proving and Trying

The year 2020 has been marked, in part, by a global pandemic that has proved, examined, and tried us in many ways. I pray that we as individuals and families are learning the valuable lessons that only challenging experiences can teach us. I also hope that all of us will more fully acknowledge the “greatness of God” and the truth that “he shall consecrate [our] afflictions for [our] gain.”⁴

Two basic principles can guide and strengthen us as we face proving and trying circumstances in our lives, whatever they may be: (1) the principle of preparation and (2) the principle of pressing forward with a steadfastness in Christ.

Proving and Preparation

As disciples of the Savior, we are commanded to “*prepare every needful thing*; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God.”⁵

We also are promised that “if ye are prepared ye shall not fear.

“And that ye might escape the power of the enemy, and be gathered unto me a righteous people, without spot and blameless.”⁶

These scriptures provide a perfect framework for organizing and preparing our lives and homes both temporally and spiritually. Our efforts to prepare for the proving experiences of mortality should follow the example of the Savior, who incrementally “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”⁷—a blended balance of intellectual, physical, spiritual, and social readiness.

On an afternoon a few months ago, Susan and I inventoried our food storage and emergency supplies. At the time, COVID-19 was spreading rapidly, and a series of earthquakes had jolted our home in Utah. We have worked since the earliest days of our marriage to follow prophetic counsel about preparing for unforeseen challenges, so “examining” our state of readiness in the midst of the virus and earthquakes seemed like a good and timely thing to do. We wanted to find out our grades on these unannounced tests.

We learned a great deal. In many areas, our preparatory work was just

right. In some other areas, however, improvement was necessary because we had not recognized and addressed particular needs in timely ways.

We also laughed a lot. We discovered, for example, items in a remote closet that had been in our food storage for decades. Frankly, we were afraid to open and inspect some of the containers for fear of unleashing another global pandemic! But you should be happy to know that we properly disposed of the hazardous materials and that health risk to the world was eliminated.

Some Church members opine that emergency plans and supplies, food storage, and 72-hour kits must not be important anymore because the Brethren have not spoken recently and extensively about these and related topics in general conference. But repeated admonitions to prepare have been proclaimed by leaders of the Church for decades. The consistency of prophetic counsel over time creates a powerful concert of clarity and a warning volume far louder than solo performances can ever produce.



Munich, Germany



Guatemala City, Guatemala

Just as challenging times reveal inadequacies in temporal preparedness, so too the maladies of spiritual casualness and complacency inflict their most detrimental effects during difficult trials. We learn, for example, in the parable of the ten virgins that procrastinating preparation leads to unsuccessful proving. Recall how the five foolish virgins failed to prepare appropriately for the examination given to them on the day of the bridegroom's coming.

"They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

"But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. . . .

"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

"Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

"And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

"But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

"And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

"Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us."⁸

"But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, Ye know me not."⁹

At least on this exam, the five foolish virgins proved themselves to be hearers only and not doers of the word.¹⁰

I have a friend who was a conscientious student in law school. During the course of a semester, Sam invested time every day to review, summarize, and learn from his notes for each course in which he was enrolled. He followed the same pattern for all of his classes at the end of every week and every month. His approach enabled him to learn the law and not merely memorize details. And as final examinations approached, Sam was prepared. In fact, he found the final exam period to be one of the least stressful parts of his legal training. Effective and timely preparation precedes successful proving.

Sam's approach to his legal education highlights one of the Lord's primary patterns for growth and development. "Thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon

precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more."¹¹

I invite each of us to "consider [our] ways"¹² and "examine [ourselves], whether [we] be in the faith; [and] prove [our] own selves."¹³ What have we learned during these recent months of lifestyle adjustments and restrictions? What do we need to improve in our lives spiritually, physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually? Now is the time to prepare and prove ourselves willing and able to do all things whatsoever the Lord our God shall command us.

Proving and Pressing Forward

I once attended a funeral for a young missionary who was killed in an accident. The missionary's father spoke in the service and described the heartache of an unexpected mortal separation from a beloved child. He forthrightly declared that he personally did not understand the reasons or timing for such an event. But I always will remember this good man also declaring that he knew God knew the reasons and timing for the passing of his child—and that was good enough for him. He told the congregation that he and his family, though sorrowful, would be fine; their testimonies remained firm and steadfast. He concluded his remarks with this declaration: "I want you to know that as far as the gospel of Jesus Christ is concerned, our family is all in. We are all in."

Though the loss of a dear loved one was heart-wrenching and difficult, the members of this valiant family spiritually were prepared to

prove that they could learn lessons of eternal importance through the things that they suffered.¹⁴

Faithfulness is not foolishness or fanaticism. Rather, it is trusting and placing our confidence in Jesus Christ as our Savior, on His name, and in His promises. As we “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men,”¹⁵ we are blessed with an eternal perspective and vision that stretches far beyond our limited mortal capacity. We will be enabled to “gather together, and stand in holy places”¹⁶ and “be not moved, until the day of the Lord come.”¹⁷

While I was serving as the president of Brigham Young University–Idaho, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland came to the campus in December 1998 to speak in one of our weekly devotionals. Susan and I invited a group of students to meet and visit with Elder Holland before he delivered his message. As our time together was drawing to a close, I asked Elder Holland, “If you could teach these students just one thing, what would it be?”

He answered:

“We are witnessing an ever greater movement toward polarity. The middle-ground options will be removed from

us as Latter-day Saints. The middle of the road will be withdrawn.

“If you are treading water in the current of a river, you will go somewhere. You simply will go wherever the current takes you. Going with the stream, following the tide, drifting in the current will not do.

“Choices have to be made. Not making a choice is a choice. Learn to choose now.”

Elder Holland’s statement about increasing polarization has been proven prophetic by the societal trends and events of the 22 years since he answered my question. Foretelling the widening divergence between the ways of the Lord and of the world, Elder Holland warned that the days of comfortably having one foot in the restored Church and one foot in the world were vanishing quickly. This servant of the Lord was encouraging the young people to choose, prepare, and become devoted disciples of the Savior. He was helping them to prepare and press forward to and through the proving, examining, and trying experiences of their lives.

Promise and Testimony

The process of proving ourselves is a fundamental part of Heavenly

Father’s great plan of happiness. I promise that as we both prepare and press forward with faith in the Savior, we all can receive the same grade on the ultimate examination of mortality: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”¹⁸

I witness that God the Eternal Father is our Father. Jesus Christ is His Only Begotten and living Son, our Savior and Redeemer. Of these truths I joyfully testify in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Abraham 3:25; emphasis added.
2. Psalm 26:2–3; emphasis added.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 98:14; emphasis added.
4. 2 Nephi 2:2.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 88:119; emphasis added.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 38:30–31.
7. Luke 2:52.
8. Matthew 25:3–4, 6–11.
9. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 25:12 (in Matthew 25:12, footnote *a*).
10. See James 1:22–25.
11. 2 Nephi 28:30.
12. Haggai 1:5, 7.
13. 2 Corinthians 13:5.
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 105:6.
15. 2 Nephi 31:20.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 101:22.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 87:8.
18. Matthew 25:21.

