



GATES ONLY YOU CAN OPEN

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History swings on small hinges—and so will your life.



The Gate of Preparation, the Gate of Performance, and the Gate of Service. You must pass through each of these gates if you are to be successful in your journey through mortality.

The Prophet Joseph Smith counseled: “Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God” (*History of the Church*, 5:134–35).

I have devoted considerable time reflecting on years gone by, when I was your age and facing your challenges, your objectives, your opportunities, your futures.

There were, however, some major differences in our times. During mine, World War II was raging in full conflict. Every young man faced military service and an interruption of his schooling. Looming in the background of every thought for each young man was the inevitable call to serve one’s country. Left behind were the comforts of family and home, the teachings of classrooms, and of course a special girlfriend. (She and I have now been married for almost 60 years!)

Whether speaking of your generation or of mine, there are some constancies amid the

changes of the times. The past is behind—we must learn from it. The future is ahead—we must prepare for it. The present is now—we must live in it.

Years ago, I discovered a thought which is true. It is this: The gate of history swings on small hinges, and so do people’s lives. I have chosen to discuss three gates which you alone can open. You must pass through each gate if you are to be successful in your journey through mortality:

The Gate of Preparation.

The Gate of Performance.

The Gate of Service.

The Gate of Preparation

First let us speak of the Gate of Preparation. The Lord has counseled, “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear” (D&C 38:30). Fear is the enemy of growth and accomplishment.

It is necessary to prepare, to plan, so that we don’t fritter away our lives. Without a goal, there can be no real success. The best definition of success I have ever found goes



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1 PREPARATION

Pattern your own personal performance after the example of the Savior as you learn of Him by reading the scriptures regularly and following their teachings.



something like this: Success is the progressive realization of a worthy ideal. Someone has said the trouble with not having a goal is that you can spend your life running up and down the field and never crossing the goal line.

I want to state here and now that wishing will not replace thorough preparation to meet the trials of life. Preparation is hard work but absolutely essential for our progress. The Lord urged: “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

The poet Emilie Poulsson put the thought this way:

*Books are keys to wisdom's treasure;
Books are gates to lands of pleasure;
Books are paths that upward lead;
Books are friends. Come, let us read.*

Concerning your preparation, let me share with you this time-honored advice, which has never been more applicable than it is right now: it is not the number of hours you put in, but what you put in the hours that counts.

Have discipline in your preparations. Have checkpoints where you can determine if you're on course. Study something you like and which will make it possible for you to support a family. While this counsel would apply almost certainly to young men, it also has relevance to young women. There are situations in life which we cannot predict which will require employable skills. You can't get the jobs of tomorrow until you have the skills of today. Business in the new economy, where the only guarantee is change, brings us to serious preparation.

Make certain as you prepare that you do not procrastinate. Someone has said that

2 PERFORMANCE

procrastination is the thief of time. Actually, procrastination is much more. It is the thief of our self-respect. It nags at us and spoils our fun. It deprives us of the fullest realization of our ambitions and hopes.

In academic preparation, I have found it a good practice to read a text with the idea that I will be asked to explain that which the author wrote and its application to the subject it covered. Also, I have tried to be attentive in any lecture in the classroom and to pretend that I would be called upon to present the same lecture to others. While this practice is very hard work, it certainly helps during test week!

The Gate of Performance

May I now turn to the Gate of Performance. Like the Gate of Preparation, you alone can open it.

The Apostle Paul provided sound counsel to guide our performance: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).

Remember that the mantle of leadership is not the cloak of comfort, but the robe of responsibility. Accountability is not for the intention but for the deed. You must continue to choose the harder right, instead of the easier wrong. The poet John Greenleaf Whittier expressed the truth when he wrote these lines: "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, / The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'" ("Maud Muller," *The Complete Poetical Works of Whittier* [1892], 48). Don't forget: one of the saddest things in life is wasted talent.

Will you remember to choose your friends carefully, for you will tend to be like them and to be found where they choose to go. Consider the love your parents have for you and that you have for them. Instead of simply asking them, "Where are the keys to your car?" you might add, "I'll be a bit late tonight." Often the clock ticks more loudly and the hands move more slowly when the night is dark, the hour is late, and a son or a daughter has not yet come home. A telephone call, "We're okay; we just stopped for something to eat. Don't worry; we're fine," is an indication

of true love of parents and of the training of a Latter-day Saint home.

Youth need fewer critics and more models to follow. Your own personal performance in all aspects of your life, including reading the scriptures regularly and following their teachings, will help you to become such models. Then the Gate of Performance will open before you as you proceed to Gate 3—the Gate of Service.

The Gate of Service

Albert Schweitzer, the noted theologian and missionary physician, declared: "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

I witnessed such an act of service one Sunday as I attended the sacrament meeting of a small branch which consisted of patients in a nursing home. Most of the members were elderly and somewhat incapacitated. During the meeting, a sister called out aloud, "I'm cold! I'm cold!" Without a moment's hesitation, one of the priests at the sacrament table arose and walked over to this sister, removed his own suit coat, placed it around her shoulders, and then returned to his duties at the sacrament table.

After the meeting, this young man came to me and apologized for blessing the sacrament without his suit coat. Quietly I said to him that he was never more appropriately dressed than he was that day when a dear widow was uncomfortably cold and he provided the warmth she needed by placing his jacket around her shoulders. A simple act of kindness? Yes, but much more: a genuine love and concern for others.

The Holy Scriptures are replete with examples of service by the servants of the Lord and by Jesus, Himself. Of Him it is recorded: "[He] went about doing good . . . ; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). He made lame beggars to walk and blind men to see. He cleansed the lepers and healed the centurion's servant. He restored to the widow at Nain her dead son, who now lived because of Him. He raised Lazarus from the tomb. He forgave the woman

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3 SERVICE

taken in adultery. He atoned for the sins of all of us. He died that we might eternally live.

As we go about our daily lives, we discover countless opportunities to follow the example of the Savior. When our hearts are in tune with His teachings, we discover the unmistakable nearness of His divine help. It is almost as though we are on the Lord's errand; and we then discover that, when we are on the Lord's errand, we are entitled to the Lord's help.

Through the years, the offices I have occupied have been decorated with lovely paintings of peaceful and pastoral scenes. However, there is one picture that always hangs on the wall which I face when seated behind my desk. It is a constant reminder of Him whom I serve, for it is a picture of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. When confronted with a vexing problem or difficult decision, I always gaze at that picture of the Master and silently ask myself the question: "What would He have me do?" No longer does doubt linger, nor does indecision prevail. The way to go is clear, and the pathway before me beckons. Such will also work for each of you as you focus on what the Lord would have you do.

The noble King Benjamin counseled his many subjects, after a lengthy but powerful sermon on the subject of service: "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17).

I pray earnestly that each of us may open wide the three gates of which I have spoken—the gate of preparation, the gate of performance and the gate of service—and walk through them to our exaltation. **NE**

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