

Prosper in the Land



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Aloha, Brothers and Sisters.

I am deeply honored to be here today with you, the graduating class of Two Thousand Seventeen, and to join Elder Kim B. Clark, the Church Commissioner of Education, his wife Sister Sue Clark, your university president, John Tanner and his wife Susan, university faculty and administrators, and your stake presidents.

All of you donned in caps and gowns before us are poised to go forward now taking much of Brigham Young University Hawaii with you. A strong indicator of the vitality of this institution is its capacity to develop strong leaders like you. You have become examples of learning and talent, faith and spirituality. There is no question, the broad reach of this institution conceived by President David O. McKay is a tremendous blessing to you, your homelands, and to the growth of the Church in so many countries.

As I stand here, I picture President McKay, who visited Laie almost a hundred years ago in Nineteen Twenty One, attending a flag ceremony at the elementary school. The mural of that event is dramatically depicted in the mosaic on the McKay building at the heart of the campus. President McKay, a young member of the Quorum of the Twelve at that time, like I am now, wrote in his journal: “Held short services in the school room in which all—American, Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino—participated as though they had belonged to one nation, one country, one tongue.”[\[i\]](#)

So, it is today. You have come from many nations but at this commencement you are one, prepared to make a difference in a world that needs you.

As we witness daily, we live in perilous times shown to prophets through the ages. Nephi saw our time and lamented that the devil would “rage in the hearts of the children of men.”[\[ii\]](#)

The Apostle Paul prophesied of our day saying:

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.”[\[iii\]](#)

Those are sobering words and yet we see them playing out in so many places. You are leaving the sanctuary of BYU Hawaii surrounded by good people with pure intent and strong understanding of God’s plan. You have set your sights high with your studies and your degree and are prepared to set a new course for your journey.

Now, what will you do? What awaits you? What will attract your interest? Your commitment? Your energy? Will you fall into perilous times and angry company? Or will you follow one of the great themes of the Book of Mormon that obedience brings great blessings.

In Second Nephi, we read:

“For the Lord God hath said that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land; and inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from my presence.”[\[iv\]](#)

The Lord does not make that promise just once but time and again—in First, Second, Third and Fourth Nephi, in Mosiah, Alma, Ether, Jarom, and Helaman.

What the Lord makes clear is that we prosper when we live the commandments of God.

I do not need to enumerate the commandments for you. You have exercised faith in the word of the Lord as you have worked through your schooling here at one of the Church’s finest schools. You have studied doctrine in religion classes; many of you have fulfilled missions; you have read and reread the *Book of Mormon*, listened and studied the messages of our leaders at General Conference and you have attended, taught and participated in teaching the gospel in the Church and in your homes.

When King Benjamin counseled his sons in the first chapter of Mosiah, he spoke of them having the Lord’s “commandments always before [their] eyes.”[\[v\]](#)

The Lord’s commandments do not change. What He asked of Mary and Martha, Lehi and Nephi He asks of us. King Benjamin describes it as “having no more disposition to do evil.”[\[vi\]](#) The Thirteenth Article of Faith lays out a Christ-like life with this declaration: “We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous and doing good to all men.”[\[vii\]](#)

There was a time when most people understood that they would be held accountable by God for living the commandments. Not so anymore. Few people observe the Sabbath with the reverence it deserves as the Lord's Day. Many consider charity, the pure love of Christ, to be simply a monetary donation. Others think nothing of taking God's name in vain; many squander the gifts He has given them in search of self-satisfying pleasures rather than following the Lord's pronouncement, "I came into the world to do the will of my Father."[\[viii\]](#)

But as disciples of Jesus Christ we are different and determined. We seek to establish His righteousness and to reflect the blessings that come from loving God and His ways.

I caution you to never take casually your commitment to Jesus Christ and His commandments. Recognize that He is the "author and finisher"[\[ix\]](#) of [your] faith. Jesus Christ will be with you as you fulfill your commitments as a disciple, a believer, a faithful follower of Him "the Son of the living God."[\[x\]](#)

So, when we are keeping the commandments, what does it mean to "prosper?"

Is it the measure of how much money we make? How many children we have? How many cars and trucks are sitting in our driveway? What positions we fill in our employment? Or even in the Church?

To prosper in the Lord's way is neither an academic discussion nor a measure of worldly goods.

I believe the Lord needs each one of us to prosper on the front lines of our professions, our community involvement—which includes actively working to keep our freedom of religion and religious liberties; keeping up with our responsibilities as honest, compassionate, fair-minded citizens, and as leaders in our families and in our faith. The Lord needs us "to wax strong in the knowledge of the truth"[\[xi\]](#) and to be examples of how living the gospel of Jesus Christ brings peace, fulfillment and happiness.

But if we measure by the world, if financial gain lures us over to the great and spacious building, if it prompts us to edge into the mists of darkness, if it compromises our ability to lead our families along the iron rod, it will never be worth the price.

Consider these three ways we may prosper:

First, to have faithful family, friends and mentors in relationships that lift us, guide us, and prompt us to do the same for others.

Second, to turn to our Father in Heaven in prayer making Him an important part of our decisions and direction. In that way, we are divinely connected to His guidance and goodness.

Third, to live the commandments so that we have the blessing of the Lord's Spirit in our lives.

To illustrate the first point, I would like to share a little about my beginnings. I prospered as a youth growing up in a very humble home where the Spirit was in abundance. I met my dear sweetheart, Melanie Twitchell, when we were in college. We dated and were married in the Salt Lake Temple, sealed for time and all eternity. We have been blessed in our love for one another, our love for our Father in Heaven and His Plan of Salvation. We chose to start our family shortly after we were married, having confidence that we would be blessed in our temporal matters if we put the Lord first. I have come to appreciate the Lord's promise, "I will lead you along."
[\[xii\]](#)

You are on the cusp of making your way in the world. I remember nearing the end of my college experience, just two semesters from graduation. I was attending school, working mostly full time, serving as an Elders' Quorum President, being a husband and a new dad. We were stretched when my high council advisor, Brother Jon Huntsman, who had become a close friend and mentor, offered me a position in his company, a large multinational firm.

Jon told me he was not interested in me because of my academic credentials; I don't think he ever knew my grade point average, (that's a good thing)! What he told me was that he saw significant character traits exemplified in my life that he felt would work well in his business, such as a strong work ethic and the ability to balance all the life-challenging priorities.

But I had to take the job immediately. That meant not finishing the last months of my schooling. Neither of my parents graduated from college and I wanted to make them proud of me. Melanie and I talked at length about the proposed position and finally she asked, "Isn't this what people go to college for, to find an opportunity like this one?" It was. We prayed for confirmation from the Lord, received it, and then took the job. Eleven years later, never having graduated from college, I was named the president of the company with thousands of employees and billions in revenue.

I credit that experience with helping me become more effective in life and in Church service. I learned on the job that people are the most important asset. I learned that if you take good care of your people they will take good care of you. And together you will prosper in your association as well as your work. I learned many, many leadership skills from the people I worked with that have served me well as a General Authority.

Just as we enjoy each other's company and encouragement, we also "mourn with those that mourn . . . and comfort those that stand in need of comfort."^[xiii] Just recently I was in Santa Rosa, California where whole communities have been devastated by fire. Everything had gone up in flames. Their homes, clothes, cars, computers, scrapbooks. Everything. As we visited with these dear brothers and sisters, I learned about sifting—they actually had large sifters for people to use; sifting through the ashes, hoping to find a wedding ring, a photo, any precious treasure and memory that might have survived the devastating fires.

I stood with a small group looking at the scorched land where whole neighborhoods once stood. I could have been in meetings but it was far more critical to be standing right there with them and letting them know we loved them and that we were praying for them.

They had nothing. But they had each other and you can imagine how touched and grateful I was to see their strength and hear their prayers in such difficult times.

The situation was similar in Beaumont-Port Arthur, Vidor, and Port Neches, Texas where Hurricane Harvey had flooded homes. I went to the neighborhoods and met with the people. Again, so little could be salvaged. My heart was saddened for those who had lost so much but grateful to watch the united efforts of missionaries and members — some who had come great distances to help in the clean-up efforts. There was so much to do. As in Santa Rosa, I learned a new term in Texas as well—mucking! That is what they called it as they were removing everything from their homes; everything—including walls, floors ceilings, furniture, and at the same time wading through deep mud and water searching for treasures and memories—our hearts were heavy for these dear brothers and sisters.

Did their disobedience bring the winds, rain, fire and floods? No. Certainly, there are times when the Lord chastens His people and some pose the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" I don't know. Perhaps the answer is because tragedies bring forth opportunities to serve and lift and teach eternal principles, because there is opposition in all things, because this is mortal life subject to the traumas of earthly existence.

The Lord has made it clear that we prosper when our associations and relationships are framed in living the commandments of God.

The second point is that prayer plays an important part in helping us prosper.

In Alma, we read:

“And they did pray unto the Lord their God continually, insomuch that the Lord did bless them, according to his word, so that they did wax strong and prosper in the land.”[\[xiv\]](#)

Praying for others, even those we do not know, will bring down power from on high. The heavens open not with replacements of what has been lost or compromised, but with God’s love and peace. The power of the Atonement, the rock upon which we build, brings peace in troubled times. I saw it happen in California and in Texas. We will see it in our lives when we face daunting challenges.

Just weeks ago, I was in Harlem, New York, an area I supervised as a mission president. I was participating in the twentieth anniversary celebration of the Church in Harlem. A piece of my heart and a piece of my testimony is still there. We had prayed long and hard for miracles in Harlem.

In Nineteen Ninety Seven, Church leaders formed the Manhattan Ninth Branch, better known as the Harlem Branch. Several days before the dedication of the Manhattan New York Temple in Two Thousand and Four, construction began on a Church-built meetinghouse in Harlem. Three wards meet in that building today. One of our missionaries, who served in that area, is now a bishop there.

We had prayed earnestly for guidance, we had pleaded with our Heavenly Father for His divine help to build the Church in Harlem— and what happened? Our prayers were answered and the Church thrived over time, and not all at once.

The third point is that obedience to the Lord’s commandments makes us worthy and able to be in His presence. That happens most directly in the temple. Remember in the scriptures, the Lord’s caution that the consequence of disobedience is being “cut off from [His] presence.”[\[xv\]](#)

I testify that temples of the Lord are our refuge from the world. The statement on the outside facade of every temple says it all: “Holiness to the Lord, The House of the Lord.”

You have a temple right here in your midst. It was the fifth temple in the Church--built in Nineteen Nineteen; we now have one hundred and fifty nine temples. This temple has blessed the lives of countless college students like you. In the temple, we renew our spiritual perspective. In the temple, we recommit our lives to the Lord. In the temple, we recognize “things as they really are and . . . things as they really will be.”[\[xvi\]](#)

President Thomas S. Monson has said:

“Come to the temple and place your burdens before the Lord and you will be filled with a new spirit and confidence in the future. Trust in the Lord and if you do, He will hold you and cradle you and lead you step-by-step along that pathway that leads to the Celestial Kingdom of God.”[\[xvii\]](#)

Temples bring to families and individuals an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord Jesus Christ and our Father in Heaven. Let me give you a personal example.

When I was first called to the Seventy many years ago, we were assigned to move to Solihul, England to serve in the Area Presidency. Sister Rasband and I took our two youngest children with us on this assignment. Our daughter was a young single adult and our son, who is here today with his family, was a seventeen-year-old who liked American-style football and played it very well. We were very concerned about them. I quickly realized what a sacrifice it would be for our children, particularly our son who was looking forward to his last year of high school and all the athletic competitions he would miss—being uprooted is not easy! There would be no friends, no extended family, and no American football! I wondered: “Would this exciting new experience prove to be a serious trial for our family?”

A partial answer came in an early assignment I received. I had been asked to speak to the missionaries at the Missionary Training Center in Preston, England. I called the president of the center, and was pleased to hear that he knew of my family’s situation. He suggested we include our children in our visit to Preston. Once there, he even invited our daughter and son to speak to the missionaries! What a thrill for them to feel included and share their testimonies of the Lord’s work!

When finished, and after tender goodbyes to those missionaries, we visited the beautiful Preston England Temple which was close to the Missionary Training Center. As we walked near the front door, there stood the temple president and matron. They greeted us and welcomed us into the temple with: “Elder Rasband, how would you and your family like to perform baptisms for the dead?” What a wonderful idea! We looked at each other and gratefully accepted. After performing the ordinances, and while my son and I were still in the font with tears of joy in our eyes, he put his hand on my shoulder and asked, “Dad, why haven’t we ever done this before?”

I thought of all the football games and movies we had attended together, all the good times we had shared—certainly happy memories and traditions that are so important to build. However, I realized we had an opportunity to add more meaningful, spiritual experiences with our children like what we had experienced in Preston that day. I knew then that our family was going to do fine in Europe.

As a family, the spirit of the temple had sanctified us. We had stepped away from the world and been spiritually lifted.

What a glorious blessing it is for so many of you to go home and attend temples in your own countries. The Church needs you in your nations; we need you to bless your communities with your sacred worship in temples. Always have a current temple recommend and count it a great honor to be worthy. Go to the temple often and you will prosper with the Spirit of the Lord in your lives.

I have identified three things that will help you prosper in your years ahead: One—pay attention to those with whom you associate—your family, friends, fellow workers, neighbors and Church members. Two—pray for guidance in your decisions and follow promptings. And three—be obedient to God’s commandments so that you may be worthy to attend the temple—His holy house.

This pattern for your life will bring blessings as described in Mosiah:

“And they were called the people of God. And the Lord did pour out his Spirit upon them, and they were blessed, and prospered in the land.”[\[xviii\]](#)

I know these things are true. I add my commendation and congratulations to all of you graduates, and charge you now to go forward—build up and establish your families, build up and establish the Lord’s Church here on the earth, and may you be blessed to prosper in the Land.

I bear witness of Jesus Christ and His ministry, His gospel and His love for each one of us gathered here today. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

[\[i\]](#) R. Lanier Britsch, *Mormona The Mormons in Hawaii*, The Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University Hawaii, 1998, 176

[\[ii\]](#) 2 Nephi 28:10

[\[iii\]](#) 2 Timothy 3:1

[\[iv\]](#) 2 Nephi 4:4

[\[v\]](#) Mosiah 1:5

[\[vi\]](#) Mosiah 5:2

[\[vii\]](#) Thirteenth Article of Faith

[\[viii\]](#) 3 Nephi 27:13

[\[ix\]](#) Hebrews 12:2

[\[x\]](#) Alma 17:2

[\[xi\]](#) Alma 17:2

[\[xii\]](#) Doctrine and Covenants 78:18

[\[xiii\]](#) Mosiah 18:9

[\[xiv\]](#) Alma 62:51

[\[xv\]](#) 2 Nephi 4:4

[\[xvi\]](#) Jacob 4:13

[\[xvii\]](#) President Thomas S. Monson, *Church News*, May 8, 1993

[\[xviii\]](#) Mosiah 25:24