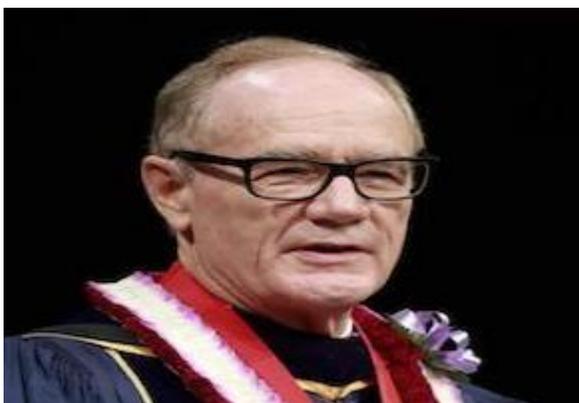


## As for Years



President John S. Tanner  
President of BYU - Hawaii  
Commencement  
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It will now be my privilege to speak to the graduates. I'm keenly aware that graduation talks, however wise and eloquent, are often forgotten before the graduate walks across the podium to receive a diploma. So, to help you remember my message tomorrow—and for many tomorrows thereafter—here it is, in three short words: “AS FOR YEARS.” That's it. “As for years.” These words are found in D&C 51; the Lord counsels a group of Saints to “act upon this land as for years.” Properly understood, there is deep wisdom embedded in the words “as for years”—wisdom that guided Susan and me when we graduated from college and moved on to next phase of our lives. And the next. And the next. And the next.

The revelation containing the phrase “as for years” was given in May 1831 to a group of Latter-day Saints from Colesville, New York newly arrived in Ohio. The Colesville Saints temporarily settled on a large farm in Thompson, Ohio, about 16 miles outside of Kirtland, on land that had been consecrated to the Church by Lemman Copley. The Colesville Saints knew that Thompson, Ohio, would not be their permanent home. Nevertheless, the Lord told them to “act upon this land as for years.” Here is a fuller quotation:

*"I consecrate unto them this land for a little season, until I, the Lord, shall provide for them otherwise and command them to go hence; and the hour and the day is not given unto them, wherefore let them act upon this land AS FOR YEARS, and this shall turn unto them for their good" (D&C 51:16-17).*

When we left BYU for Berkeley, Susan and I determined to live in our new home “as for years” and it truly turned unto us for our good. It always has as we have tried to live in each new home “as for years” by accepting callings, participating in ward activities and service projects, exploring local historic sites and landscapes, and getting to know our neighbors. As a result, we have fond memories and dear friends from everywhere we have lived, and have come to love a great variety of peoples, cultures, and geographies.

By contrast, we have observed some others in our situation who never truly unpacked their bags and settled in; who were constantly counting the days until they could leave; who never gave themselves to the experience. As a result, they tended to be critical, impatient, uninvolved, and unhappy.

Acting upon the land as for years is an especially important lesson to learn in your young adult years. For life tends to be more transient while seeking education and employment. It is tempting to regard school and your first jobs merely as way stations along the path toward a permanent job and home, and hence to hold back. It is easy to feel like James Garner in the goofy old Western "Support Your Local Sheriff," who tells everyone he meets that he is "just passing through" town. A lot of us act as if we were just passing through life. We refuse to be "all in" because we know that someday we will be out. We don't risk putting down roots because we believe that before long we will be uprooted.

But this is no way to lead the life God intends for us, either in college or after. He wants us to build Zion wherever we are, for however long we are there. Similarly, BYU-Hawaii wants you to "learn, lead, and build." Builders act upon the land "as for years."

The counsel to "act upon this land as for years" was given not for the benefit of the Colesville Saints alone, but for all Latter-day Saints, in every generation. Through it the Lord established a principle for the whole Church. The pioneers would later act upon this principle as they built bridges, planted crops, and founded settlements that they knew they must soon abandon. In doing so, the pioneers followed the pattern set by the Colesville Saints, who, despite being told that they would live in Thompson, Ohio but "a little season," immediately set about mending fences, planting crops, and making improvements on Leman Copley's farm.

They did this knowing they would leave but not knowing when: "the hour and the day is not given unto them." Nor is it given to us. We don't know whether our sojourn will be long or brief in mortality. As the Apostle James wrote, "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow" (James 4:14). Nonetheless, we are to live in the present "as for years." We are to "lift where we stand,"<sup>[1]</sup> rather than be ever waiting for some future time and place to establish Zion. We are to build Zion wherever the Lord calls us, for as long as He calls us.

Now, let me conclude with the rest of the story about the Colesville Saints. It makes for a poignant punctuation point on the Lord's counsel "act upon this land as for years." It turned out, their "little season" in Ohio was not to be for years but for weeks! The owner of the property in Thompson reneged on his offer to consecrate his land to the Church. So, having been told in May to "act upon this land as for years," in June the Lord commanded the Colesville Saints to pull up stakes and move on to Missouri (see D&C 54:8). And off they trudged to Jackson County. Five days after they arrived, the Lord revealed that this was to be the land of Zion (see D&C 57). No doubt, they thought that this time they would live in their new home not just for years, but for generations. Little did they know that Jackson County, too, would be a temporary home. As would Nauvoo and Winter Quarters. And, for many, the Salt Lake Valley.

So why did the Lord tell them, and by implication us, to act upon the land “as for years” when He knew they would leave it so soon? Even more painfully, why does He command us to “live together in love” when He knows that this will just make it hurt all the more when a loved one dies? (See D&C 42:45) Does he just enjoy irony? No. I believe that the Lord wants a people who can, with equal grace, plant gardens and abandon them, build temples and leave them, accept callings and welcome releases, love family and friends and be able to part with them, live joyfully in the moment while looking forward to the joys of eternity.

In short, he wants us to develop the spiritual poise Shakespeare articulates in the final couplet of one of his most poignant sonnets, which praises a friend for loving him though he knows the poet will die soon: “This thou perceiv’st, which makes thy love more strong, / To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.”<sup>[2]</sup>

May we, too, learn to love well places and people we must lose ere long. Acting upon the land “as for years” will surely turn unto us for our good. It will enrich our days here on earth and render our reunions in heaven all the sweeter. I so testify in the name of the Savior, whom I love. Amen.

<sup>[1]</sup> Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Lift Where You Stand," *Ensign*, November 2008, 53- 56.

<sup>[2]</sup> William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 73" in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1997), 1856.