

A Quest for Life Eternal



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I think the title “A Quest for Life Eternal” gives a broad enough platform for me to engage you in a conversation. I feel it is a tremendous responsibility and privilege to speak to you today. I pray for the inspiration of heaven to attend me and to inspire my remarks. A Man of God and a School in Laie Eighty-four years ago Elder David O. McKay stopped in Laie during a tour of Church missions. He attended the flag-raising and devotional exercises of the Laie Mission School, where 127 children of many races were enrolled. Elder McKay was deeply touched as he watched these children singing and praying and pledging allegiance to the flag of the United States. As he watched the proceedings, he envisioned a Church school of higher learning for Laie that would eventually complement the recently dedicated Hawaii Temple in Laie. That vision, which endured for many years, including the years of World War II, culminated in what became the Church College of Hawaii, later renamed BYU–Hawaii. In February of 1955, the man who by then had become President of the Church—David O. McKay—presided at the groundbreaking services. In September of that year the Church College of Hawaii officially commenced classes with a student body of 153. Today on this beautiful campus there are some 2,400 students from Asia, the Pacific Islands, the U.S., and other parts of the world. You represent over 70 countries and are fulfilling the dream that President David O. McKay had for you and the thousands of others who have passed, and who will yet pass, through these hallowed halls. As he broke ground 50 years ago, President McKay declared that there were two purposes for the school: first, for things “pertaining to God and His kingdom” and, second, to “develop . . . character, and make noble men and women” (David O. McKay, address at the Church College of Hawaii groundbreaking, 12 February 1955; in Reuben D. Law, *The Founding and Early Development of the Church College of Hawaii* [St. George, Utah: Dixie College Press, 1972], 66–67). For 50 years now this institution has been fulfilling these noble purposes. It will continue to do so.

Honoring David O. McKay As we celebrate this Golden Jubilee, may we also, in a sense, celebrate the life of that giant of the Lord, President David O. McKay. It was he who, 42 years ago this month, extended to me my call to the apostleship—an event in my life too sacred to detail. Before that time, I had assisted him in preparing his writings and discourses so that they could be printed and published. President McKay was an educator and a patron of the arts. He was a teacher of truth after the pattern of the Master Teacher, even our Savior, Jesus Christ. Ever courteous and gentlemanly, President McKay was the epitome of kindness. I observed this trait when, long before I was a General Authority, I entered his office to review some printing proofs. On that particular occasion I noticed a picture on the wall, and I said to him, “President McKay, that’s a lovely painting. Is it a rendition of your childhood home in Huntsville, Utah?” He sat back in his chair, gave a familiar David O. McKay chuckle, and said, “Let me tell you about that picture. A sweet woman came in to see me one autumn day and presented to me that beautiful painting, framed and ready to be placed on the wall. She said, ‘President McKay, I have spent the entire summer painting this picture of your ancestral home.’” He said he accepted the gift and thanked her profusely. “Do you know, Brother Monson,” he continued, “that dear woman painted the

wrong house. She painted the house next door! I didn't have the heart to tell her she painted the wrong house. She may come back, so that's why it's hanging on the wall." But then he made this comment, and here is a vital lesson for us: "In reality, Brother Monson, she painted the right house because when as a young boy I would lie on the bed, which was on the front porch of my ancestral home, the view I had through the screened porch was of the very house she painted. She did paint the right house for me!" As a new member of the Quorum of the Twelve in 1963, I met my colleagues for the first time in the fourth-floor room of the Salt Lake Temple where the Presidency and the Twelve assembled. We were having the sacrament that day, and, as we were preparing to receive it, President McKay said to other members of the First Presidency and to the Quorum of the Twelve, "Before we partake of the bread and water, I would like to invite our newest member, Brother Monson, to instruct the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve on the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will hear from you now, Brother Monson." I can tell you, that was a heart-stopper for me. At the conclusion of the meeting, we went to the lunchroom, where we were eating in the area reserved for the First Presidency and the Twelve. President McKay was making conversation with me and said, "Brother Monson, do you believe that William Shakespeare really wrote the sonnets attributed to him?" "Yes," I replied, "I do, President McKay." He responded, "Wonderful! So do I; so do I." In the moment of silence that followed, I thought to myself, "I hope he moves away from Shakespeare; I'm a business major." However, he turned to me and said, "Brother Monson, do you read Shakespeare?" I responded, "Occasionally." "Fine," he said. "What is your favorite work of Shakespeare?" I thought quickly and replied, "Henry the Eighth." He was unrelenting. "Which is your favorite passage?" he asked. I had another heart-stopping moment right there. Then I thought of Cardinal Wolsey, that man who served his king but had neglected God. Shorn of all his power, he lamented: Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king, he would not in mine age Have left me naked to mine enemies. [William Shakespeare, King Henry the Eighth, act 3, scene 2, lines 455–57] President McKay smiled. "Oh, I love that passage, too," he said. He then changed the subject, for which I shall be -eternally grateful. President David O. McKay was a giant among men—truly a prophet of God. I pay tribute to him and honor his name. Guidelines for Your Quest My young friends, today I also pay tribute to you. As one who loves you and who, with your parents, appreciates your great expectations, may I discuss with you four guiding principles to help you in your quest for education and to assist you throughout your lives? These guidelines are prepare properly, serve willingly, live honorably, and pray earnestly. Prepare Properly First, let us prepare properly. When we contemplate the eternal nature of our choices, preparation is a vital factor in our lives. The day will come when we will look back upon our period of preparation and be grateful that we properly applied ourselves. Many years ago, when I worked in the printing and -publishing business, I had the opportunity to address a business convention in Dallas, Texas, a city known as the City of Churches. After the convention, I took a casual sightseeing tour by bus around the city's suburbs. As we would pass the beautiful churches, our driver would comment, "On the left you see the Methodist church" or "There on the right is the Catholic cathedral." As we passed a beautiful red brick building situated upon a hill, the driver exclaimed, "That building is where the Mormons meet." A lady's voice from the rear of the bus called out, "Driver, can you tell us something about the Mormons?" The driver pulled the bus over to the side of the road, turned around in his seat, and replied, "Lady, all I know about the Mormons is that they meet in that red brick building. Is there anyone on this bus who knows anything about the Mormons?" I gazed at the expression on each person's face for some sign of recognition, some desire to comment. I found nothing—not a sign. Then I realized for the first time the truth of the statement "When the time for decision arrives, the time for preparation is past." For the next fifteen minutes, I had the privilege of giving, as Peter declared, "a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Since that time, I have developed a greater appreciation for the matter of proper preparation. You will recall the truth from the Doctrine and Covenants: "If ye are prepared ye shall not fear" (D&C 38:30). I once had the opportunity to teach at the university level. Some of the students seemed to know where they were going. They applied themselves. They had objectives, they had goals, and they worked toward the achievement of these objectives and goals. Other students could not have cared less. They seemed to be drifting on a sea of chance, with waves of failure threatening to engulf them. In your pursuit of excellence, real effort is required. Remember, "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6). I love the words of the American industrialist Henry Ford, who said: An educated man is

not one whose memory is trained to carry a few dates in history—he is one who can accomplish things. A man who cannot think is not an educated man however many college degrees he may have acquired. Thinking is the hardest work any one can do—which is probably the reason why we have so few thinkers. [Henry Ford, *My Life and Work*, in collaboration with Samuel Crowther (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1922), 247] Greater than academic preparation is the matter of spiritual preparation. We must acquire for ourselves a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ—a testimony that President David O. McKay described as an anchor to the soul. In this inquiring, inquisitive period of your lives, some of you may ask, as did Pilate, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). And again we turn to the revelations for guidance: “And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness. That which is of God is light” (D&C 50:23–24). Prepare properly. Serve Willingly Next, serve willingly. The Lord declared, “The Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days” (D&C 64:34). A wise man of experience, Harry Emerson Fosdick, once observed: Men will work hard for money. [Men] will work harder for other men. But men will work hardest of all when they are dedicated to a cause. . . . Duty is never worthily performed until it is performed by one who would gladly do more if only he could. [In Emerson Roy West, comp., *Vital Quotations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 38; see also Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Second Mile* (New York: Association Press, 1912), 26] When you help another in his race of life, you really also serve your God. King Benjamin stated the principle so beautifully: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). Let no one of us follow the example of Laman or Lemuel. When given an opportunity to serve, they murmured, saying that it was a hard thing that had been required of them. Their privilege was taken from them and given to willing Nephi, who confidently responded, “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7). We do not live alone in our city, our nation, or our world. The New Testament teaches that it is impossible to take a right attitude toward Christ without taking an unselfish attitude toward men. “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). As we pray to our Heavenly Father each day, let us pray for His inspiration in guiding us to those to whom He would have us extend a helping hand or a listening ear. Many years ago, as a bishop, I worried about any members of the ward who were inactive. Such was my thought one day as I drove down the street where Ben and Emily lived. The aches and pains of advancing years had caused them to withdraw from activity to the shelter of their home. Isolated, detached, shut out from the mainstream of daily life and association, Ben and Emily had not been in our sacrament meeting for many years. Ben, who had many years before served as a bishop in another ward, loved to sit in his front room reading the New Testament. I was en route from my uptown sales office to our plant. For some reason I had driven down First West, a street I never had traveled before to reach the destination of our plant. Then I felt the unmistakable prompting to park my car and visit Ben and Emily, even though I was on my way to a meeting. I did not heed the impression at first but drove on for two more blocks; however, when the impression came again, I returned to their home. I approached the door to their home and knocked. Emily opened the door and, upon seeing me—her bishop—she exclaimed, “All day long I have waited for my phone to ring. It has been silent. I hoped that the postman would deliver a letter. He brought only bills. Bishop, how did you know today is my birthday?” I answered, “Our Heavenly Father knows, Emily, for He loves you. I don’t know why I was directed here today, but He knows. Let’s kneel in prayer and ask Him.” Ben came into the room, and the three of us knelt in prayer. The reason for my visit was made clear as I felt impressed to invite both Ben and Emily to join us in our Church meetings, asking each of them to respond to a particular assignment. Each accepted and began regular attendance once again at Church, remaining active for the rest of their lives. That day of my visit with Ben and Emily, hearts were touched and souls saved. My young brothers and sisters, it is most important that we learn to serve willingly. Live Honorably My next guideline is to live honorably. Avoid the detours that will deprive you of your celestial reward. You can recognize them if you will. They may be labeled “Just this once won’t matter” or “My parents are so old-fashioned.” Bad habits also can be such pitfalls: First, we could break them if we would. Later, we would break them if we could. Each of you has received from the Savior— and I emphasize it anew today—the divine charge to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and -glorify

your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). “Ye are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). To glow with brilliance, our code of conduct emphasizes not so much the philosophy “What will others think?” but rather “What will I think of myself?” When I contemplate living honorably, my thoughts inevitably turn to Brother Gustav Wacker. I met Brother Wacker when I served as president of the Canadian Mission in Eastern Canada. He was president of the Kingston Branch of that mission. He was from Germany and spoke English with a thick accent. He never owned or drove a car. He was a barber by trade, making but little money cutting hair near an army base at Kingston. How Brother Wacker loved the missionaries! The highlight of his day would be when he had the privilege to cut the hair of a missionary. Never would there be a charge. When the missionaries would make a feeble attempt to pay him, Brother Wacker would say, “Oh no, it is a joy to cut the hair of a servant of the Lord.” Indeed, he would reach deep into his pockets and give the missionaries all of his tips for the day. If it were raining, as it often did in Kingston, President Wacker would call a taxi and send the missionaries to their apartment by cab, while he himself at day’s end would lock the small shop and walk home alone in the driving rain. I first met Gustav Wacker when I noticed that his tithing was far in excess of that expected from his potential income. My efforts to explain to him that the Lord required no more than a tenth fell on attentive but unconvinced ears. He simply responded that he loved to pay all he could to the Lord. It amounted to about a third of his income. His dear wife felt exactly as he did. Their unique manner of tithing payment continued. Gustav and Margarete Wacker established a home that was a heaven. They were not blessed with children, but they mothered and fathered the young missionaries who loved to visit them. Men of learning and men of experience sought out this humble man of God and counted themselves fortunate if they could spend an hour with him. His appearance was ordinary, his English was halting and somewhat difficult to understand, his home was unpretentious. He did none of the things to which the world usually pays attention; yet the faithful beat a path to his door. Why? Because they wished to drink at his “fountain of truth.” It was not so much what he said as what he did; not the substance of the sermons he preached but the strength of the life he lived. He had the glow of goodness and the radiance of righteousness. His strength came from obedience. In their later years, Brother and Sister Wacker served a proselyting mission to their native Germany and later a temple mission in the beautiful Washington D.C. Temple. Then, in 1983, his mission in mortality concluded: dressed in his white temple suit, Gustav Wacker peacefully passed away in the Washington D.C. Temple while being held in the loving arms of his eternal companion. He had felt a bit faint, and the two of them found a sofa there in the temple, where they sat down just before he slipped away. He had not laid up for himself treasures on earth; rather, he had laid up for himself treasures in heaven (see Matthew 6:19–20). The Psalmist wrote ever so long ago: “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes” (Psalm 118:8–9). Live honorably. Pray Earnestly My final guideline today is to pray earnestly. As we pursue our quest for eternal life, we will come to many forks and turns in the road. We cannot venture into the uncertainties of the future without reference to the certainties of the past. Your challenge is to join the forces of the old and the new—experience and experiment, history and destiny, the world of man and the new world of science—but always in accordance with the never-changing word of God. In short, He becomes your pilot on this eternal journey. He knows the way. His counsel can keep us from the pitfalls threatening to engulf us and will lead us, rather, to the way of life eternal. As we face the temptations of time, the confusion of choice, the embarrassment of error, the pursuit of perfection, our Heavenly Father is there to listen, to love, to inspire. Our Father, to whom we earnestly pray, is not an ethereal substance or a mysterious and incomprehensible being. Rather, He has eyes with which to view our actions, lips with which to speak to us, ears to hear our pleas, and a heart to understand our love. In our petition, we must remember that faith and doubt cannot exist in the mind at the same time, for one will dispel the other. Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire. It is our compass to guide our lives. Prayer provides power—spiritual power. Prayer provides peace—spiritual peace. In February 1965, on my first visit to the village of Sauniatu, Samoa—so loved by President David O. McKay—my wife, Frances, and I met with a large gathering of small children. At the conclusion of our messages to these shy but beautiful youngsters, I suggested to the native Samoan teacher that we go forward with the closing exercises. As he announced the final hymn, the distinct impression came to me that I should personally greet each of these children. My watch revealed that the time was too short for such a privilege, so I discounted the impression. Before the benediction was to be spoken, I again felt this strong impression to shake

the hand of each child. This time I made the desire known to the instructor, who displayed a broad and beautiful smile. He spoke in Samoan to the children, and they beamed their approval of his comments. The instructor then revealed to me the reason for his and their joy. He said, "When we learned that President McKay had assigned a member of the Council of the Twelve to visit us in faraway Samoa, I told the children if they would each one earnestly and sincerely pray and exert faith like the Bible accounts of old, that the Apostle would visit our tiny village at Sauniatu, and, through their faith, he would be impressed to greet each child with a personal handclasp." Tears could not be restrained as each of those precious boys and girls walked shyly by and whispered softly to us a sweet talofa lava. Their prayers had been answered. My young brothers and sisters, may you prepare properly, serve willingly, live honorably, and pray earnestly. A Prophet's Testimony and Prayer for Your Success I testify to you that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, our Older Brother, our Mediator with the Father, our Lord, and our Savior. May you have this same testimony in your hearts to guide you well throughout your sojourn here in mortality and into the eternal worlds of our Heavenly Father. Your parents are proud of you. Your faculty members are pleased with your accomplishments. The leaders of the Church honor you. As we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of this fine institution of higher learning, whose existence came about by inspiration, may you remember who you are and what you can become. May you choose the right when the choice is placed before you. May you honor your parents. May you love and serve God. May you also love your fellow man. May you have peace within your hearts and contentment within your souls. For these things I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.