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*To Acquire Knowledge and the  
Strength to Use It Wisely*

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# *To Acquire Knowledge and the Strength to Use It Wisely*

RICHARD G. SCOTT

**I** find it increasingly difficult to speak to you who qualify in worthiness, testimony, and personal capacity to be here on this singular campus. This sense of inadequacy comes from the deep respect and sincere love I feel for each of you. Today my intent is to help you, while your life unfolds in productive ways, to obtain the profound joy and happiness I am blessed to have. If such joy is the nature of your life, what I say will be a confirmation of what you already have been privileged to learn and apply. If that is not the pattern of your life, I will suggest truths that can help you find consistent, enduring happiness.

First, I will share a principle that, if understood and consistently applied, will bring enormous blessings throughout your life. It is not difficult for me to explain, nor for you to understand. However, it will require of you significant, determined effort to yield its full potential. With it you can learn vital truths that will bring you greater, enduring happiness and make your life more productive and meaningful. I suggest that you write down the principle as I share it. I will then explain it.

*I will consistently strive to learn by what I hear, see, and feel.*

*I will write down the important things I learn, and I will do them.*

You can learn vitally important things by what you *hear* and *see* and, especially, by what you *feel*, as prompted by the Holy Ghost. Most individuals limit their learning primarily to what they hear or what they read. Be wise. Develop the skill of learning by what you see and particularly by what the Holy Ghost prompts you to feel. Consciously seek to learn by what you see and feel, and your capacity to do so will expand through consistent practice. Ask in faith for such help. Live to be worthy of it. Seek to recognize it. Write down in a secure place the important things you learn from the Spirit. You will find that as you write down precious impressions, often more will come. Also the knowledge you gain will be available throughout your life. Always, day or night, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, seek to recognize and respond to the direction of the Spirit. Express gratitude for the help received and obey it. This practice

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*Richard G. Scott is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This devotional address was given on 23 January 2001 in the Marriott Center.*

will reinforce your capacity to learn by the Spirit. It will permit the Lord to guide your life and to enrich the use of every other capacity latent in your being.

If I had the power to communicate the importance of the principle just shared, I could end this message now, and you would have received the major benefit from your being here. It requires effort and practice to consistently learn by what you see and feel. I suggest each one of you practice this principle now while we are together. As I ask a few basic questions that only you can answer for yourself, will you think of your responses? Perhaps you can jot them down. Then consciously ask the Lord to help you recognize any guidance He wants to give you. Since the Lord will not force you to learn, you must exercise your agency to authorize the Spirit to teach you. Continue to seek this guidance while I suggest some ways to realize your aspirations. I will also suggest what can motivate you powerfully to higher achievement. What you write down from the impressions you feel will be the most valuable help you can receive today.

Let us begin. Here are the questions:

*What are some of the most fundamental priorities of your life?*

*What challenges do you face in realizing your dreams and aspirations?*

*What are some of the obstacles that impede your progress?*

*What motivates you to overcome temptation and live righteously so that the Lord can guide and strengthen you?*

In the balance of our time together, try to recognize any spiritual promptings that will communicate a personalized message from the Lord. I will now speak to each of you as though we were in a private conversation where we share our purest feelings—as two can do where there is mutual trust and common beliefs.

The fundamental motivation in some lives is to be popular by doing what is popular. Others, more wise, are motivated by love of the Savior and His truth. They are willing to stand for correct principles despite peer pressure. I will illustrate the consequences of each of these patterns.

Recently I met an intelligent young man with outstanding parents. There are exceptional material and spiritual resources available to him. He is undecided about a mission. He attends a community college because it is easier than going to a university. In his free time he only does those things that he likes to do. He doesn't work because he doesn't need to, and it would take time away from his pleasures. He took seminary classes to pass them without much thought of how he should personally apply the knowledge gained. Finally I asked:

*Can I speak to you from my heart? I don't want to offend but rather to point out something. You are making choices today that seem very reasonable to you. They seem to give you what you want: an easy life with abundant enjoyment and not much sacrifice on your part. You can do that for a while, but what you don't realize is that every decision you make is narrowing your future. You are eliminating possibilities and options. There will come a time, and it won't be too distant, where you are going to spend the rest of your life doing things you don't want to do, in places you don't want to be, because you have not prepared yourself. You are not taking advantage of your opportunities.*

I mentioned how everything I treasure today began to mature in the mission field. Missionary service is not something we do for ourselves. We have our agency. We can choose what we want to do. Yet, for me, the greatest growth and preparation for the future that most youth have today is gained in a mission. There they focus outside of themselves on other people. They draw

close to the Lord and really learn His teachings. They find individuals interested in the message but not sure of its worth. They try with every capacity—prayer, fasting, and testifying—to help that person change his life. That’s what a mission does when it is done selflessly, as many here can testify. I felt impressed to give this young man a blessing. As he walked out of the room, I prayed earnestly that somehow the Lord would touch him to choose the right priorities. Otherwise his progress will be limited and his happiness short-circuited.

In stark contrast I share the example of another young man. Through the years I have watched how his parents have taught him from infancy to unwaveringly live the commandments of God. By example and precept, they nurtured him and their other children in truth. They encouraged the development of discipline and sacrifice to obtain worthy goals. This young man chose swimming as an activity that could instill in his character these qualities. The early-morning practice sessions required discipline and sacrifice. Over time he excelled in that sport.

Then came the challenges—for example, a championship swim meet on Sunday. Would he participate? To help his team win the championship would he rationalize an exception to his rule of not swimming on Sunday? No, he would not yield, even under intense peer pressure. He was peppered with derisive comments, even physically abused. But he would not yield. The rejection of friends, the loneliness, and the pressure brought times of sadness and tears. But he would not yield. He was learning firsthand what each of us must come to know, the reality of Paul’s counsel to Timothy: “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). I have observed how over the years this consistent pattern of righteous living—woven from hundreds of correct decisions, some in the face of great challenge—

has developed a character of strength and capacity. Now, as a missionary, he is respected by his peers for his capacity to work, his knowledge of truth, his unwavering devotion, and his determination to share the gospel. One who earlier was rejected by his peers now has become a leader of his peers.

Is there a message for you in these examples? How can you see with greater clarity and receive more help through the veil to accomplish your aspirations? I would remind you of eight of the many sources of help.

### **First: Faith in Jesus Christ**

There will always be a need for you to walk to the edge of the light of your knowledge and testimony into the twilight of faith. You will be asked to exercise faith in truths you have not yet come to prove through your own experience or through the sacred witness of the Holy Ghost.

Exercise faith in Jesus Christ and in His infinite capacity to bless. Faith leads one to action, to achieve goals even when there is little visible evidence to give hope of success. Faith is abiding trust in truth. Therefore it is a source of power to know simple yet profoundly important truths and to have the faith to live them. Enduring happiness is rooted in unchangeable truth lived in faith.

### **Second: Guiding Principles**

You have likely established a set of guiding principles for your life. If not, do so now. With such standards you will not make the wrong decisions on the basis of the circumstances or the pressures of the day. Principles that you are determined to live by will keep you on track. Base them on the teachings of Jesus Christ. As you use your guiding principles, be honest with yourself. Tragedy, disappointment, and lack of attainment in life come when one is dishonest with self or with the Lord.

Never compromise your principles. Strength and safety come from making no exceptions to them. No matter how it seems that conditions would justify some departure from them, do not do it. Rationalization leads one to take something that is true and twist it to justify invalid exceptions. Rationalization is Satan's tool to lead one from truth. Difficulties in life start when small deviations from standards are justified on the basis of circumstance. Individuals who live for the moment make decisions based on circumstance or what someone else tempts them to do. Such are doomed eventually to violate eternal law and to undermine the great opportunities of life. They may seem to gain an advantage, but that is temporary. They lose those things that bring eternal happiness. As you center your life in truth, you are assured success and happiness.

### **Third: Prayer**

You have found that prayer can be a source of great comfort, direction, and sustaining power. Too often in the routine of daily life you may be tempted to offer hurried, mechanical prayers of no value. Prayers that bring comfort, solace, direction, and great inner strength are like those offered by Enos. He taught the importance of praying with "faith in Christ" and being diligent "in keeping [His] commandments" (Enos 1:8, 10). These words of Enos show how to pray for something vital:

*My faith began to be unshaken in the Lord; and I prayed unto him with many long strugglings. . . .*

*And it came to pass that after I had prayed and labored with all diligence, the Lord said unto me: I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith. [Enos 1:11–12, emphasis added]*

When you are prompted to ask the Lord for something that way, you will often receive far more understanding and help than expected.

### **Fourth: Scriptures**

The scriptures are an excellent source of understanding and strength when pondered with faith in the Savior. They bolster faith in truth. When the truths revealed are applied diligently, they become a vital source of worthy motivation. You will increase your courage to do what is right. Your discipline to adhere to the most important priorities of life will be fortified.

The scriptures give eloquent confirmation of how truth consistently lived opens the door to inspiration to know what to do and, where needed, the divine power to do it. As you reflect upon how others' capacities to conquer difficulty, doubt, and overwhelming challenges were strengthened by the Lord, the Holy Spirit will confirm that their experiences are true. You will know that similar help is available to you.

### **Fifth: Temple Worship**

Another most significant way to enhance your capacity to understand and live eternal truths is through temple worship. Only by receiving the fulness of temple ordinances and living the covenants made there can you enter into the highest degree of glory and receive the greatest measure of eternal happiness. Temple attendance has a calming, settling, consoling influence that distills peace and contentment. It provides an environment for inspiration in answer to prayers. The accompanying family history work yields similar blessings.

### **Sixth: Moral Cleanliness**

Your goal to be morally clean is central to your enduring happiness. You decide by your daily choices whether it will be realized. Garner strength by remembering that you

can do anything the Lord asks you to do. When strength is needed, and asked for, He will help you keep this vital commandment. As you do all you are capable of doing, your trust in Him will give you capacity to overcome all obstacles.

#### **Seventh: Consistent Hard Work**

It is a principle of happiness to work hard and to willingly obey the principles of truth, confident that the Lord will open doors of help when needed. You are learning the valuable lesson that significant attainment requires significant effort. Our Father will not violate His plan. He will not give eternal blessings to those who want them but who are not willing to pay the price.

#### **Eighth: Good Music**

Good music, especially sacred music, makes spiritual things more understandable. It is edifying and conducive to willing obedience. It prepares emotions for response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Stay away from the poison of evil music.

I am afraid it may seem like I've been lecturing to you in our private interview. Forgive me. I don't mean to do that. I just want to share what has brought me immeasurable happiness along with a meaningful life.

There is one additional suggestion before I end. Some places are sacred and holy where it seems easier to discern the direction of the Holy Spirit. The temple is such a place. You can make other places that way by the way you respect them and behave while there. You need a retreat of peace and quiet where periodically you can ponder and let the Lord establish the direction of your life. It may seem difficult to find time to meditate with the daily

pressures of university life. Yet a moment of thought will confirm that no matter how fast you move forward, if you are on the wrong path, it will avail you nothing. Each of us needs to periodically check our bearings and confirm that we are on course. The beginning of a new semester seems like an ideal time to do it. Sometime soon you may benefit from taking this personal inventory:

*What are my highest priorities for life?*

*How do I use my discretionary time? Is some of it consistently used for my highest priorities?*

*Is there anything I know I should not be doing? If so, I will stop it now.*

I sincerely thank you for listening so intently and for writing the impressions you have felt. It is such an edifying experience to be with you here at Brigham Young University. You are a precious treasure. Your righteous lives will bless many others wherever you go. I feel that you either have been or will be doing the things we've discussed. I have left the most important thing I can do for you for these last moments.

I solemnly testify that God our Father lives, that His plan is perfect. I bear testimony that as you raise your voice in prayer, those prayers are heard. They are best answered when offered from a broken heart and a contrite spirit. I know that someday I will be judged for how well I testify of my certain knowledge of Jesus Christ. Therefore, I solemnly witness that because of His Atonement, our Father's plan of happiness will succeed. Satan's plan is doomed to failure. I know that Jesus Christ lives. I solemnly witness with every capacity that I possess that He lives and that He loves you. Through your obedience He will help you find happiness. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.