



Put the Lord First

by
Monte C. Nelson
Owner, H&R Block Franchises

President Woodhouse, faculty and students of LDS Business College, thank you very much for this honor to come and speak here. When they invited me I quickly reminisced back a few years, and Sunday I was reviewing some of my notes. My little grandson who is six years old—I think he has already been to LDS Business College, he is so bright—we were sitting there talking and he said, "What's that for Grandpa?" I told him what it was, and he said "What's LDS Business College?" I told him and he said, "How old were you when you went there?" I told him and he said, "Gee, grandpa, you are old."

Let me just mention, I hope I can instill at least in one of you the desire that was created in me when I first found the Church. I was in the Navy. I might just mention that the LDS Business College really holds a lot of fond memories for me. It was a place of fulfillment of my dreams. My dreams there started two years or so before I came out of the Navy. At the time I was a member of the Church. I was, I guess, an inactive member because I thought everybody in the world was a Latter-Day Saint. I found the Lord—I found God—while I was in the Navy.

The thing I want to instill in you is that it became so overpowering to me that I used everything I found in the Book of Mormon and in the Bible to guide my life. What I want to talk to you about is going to be "put the Lord first—don't put him on the back burner." You will find as you go through life, and as you're starting here now in college, you'll find all the excuses in the world not to accept an assignment from the Lord because "I'm studying too hard," or "I have to go to work," or all these things. But I'm here to tell you that if you will always put the Lord first, he will then put you first and he will help you and he will guide you in your studies. I have several buddies that came here to LDS with me, and they would not accept any curricular work with the Church.

They said, "Oh, I have to work on my studies." Some people would say, maybe, I was a little brighter than they were but I don't think so. I think it was because the Lord blessed me, but I always came out with A's. They were struggling to even pass what they were doing and to understand things.

One of the great things that I found when I joined the Church, if you have not already found out, is that I found that God was an individual like you and me. In the 73 years that I've lived I've not found anything that ever contradicted that. I found that he is there all the time to guide us. He created us as spirit children; we're his literal sons, spiritual sons and daughters and he gave us a promise that started my whole life that I'm still working on. He said, Monte—he didn't say Monte that way—but he said I want you to be like me. I want you to become a god. Isn't that kind of overpowering to hear, that first of all you find deity and you find he is a man? Of course I grew up without a father, so it was tremendously important to me and satisfying when I found that I did have a Father in Heaven too. I learned from that that I did have a Father in Heaven too. I learned, however, that I then would have available to me the restored gospel. I can testify to you of the strength and guidance the gospel has been to me as I have endeavored to complete my mission here on earth. More important, I'm indebted to my God for giving me the privilege of growing and developing and maturing both physically and spiritually.

I wrote as I was coming down the canyon, and my wife said, "What are you doing, rewriting your talk?" I said no, but I want to say something to you people. I don't know how many of you have heard of Lowell Bennion; he is deceased now. He was a great teacher of the Church; he was a great teacher of the institutes of the Church, a master teacher. He said that one of the greatest things that we could do would be to make a list of all the things that are important. I read that way back then,

and I did that very thing. He said in that list there will rise out of it (like cream always rises to the top) things that matter most. I think what I could be saying here, and I may be a little repetitious in it and may be overbearing on what I want to talk about, but the things that matter most to me are the things that helped me succeed—helped me to have success in life, helped me to have happiness, helped me to find my mate, helped me to raise my children. There is no end to it, and it has to do with the Church. It has to always be the fact that the Church has to come first. That's a little hard to understand.

This being the case, then what is most important? It is what we do with our lives. Life to me is much more than simply existing on planet earth, although I unfortunately know individuals who appear to be only existing. You may have some of those friends around you. They are displeased with the friends they keep or don't have, the way they look, the lack of fun in their lives, the lack of material belongings when compared with those of their neighbors, and the list goes on and on. In their own words, they are simply "trying to make it" through life as they can.

I personally feel that you work your goals out and you pursue them in a definite plan. I rather enjoy reviewing my life as a time of learning and testing. It has been a time to prove myself worthy of eternal opportunities as outlined by God's plan which he laid down and gave to each of us when we left his presence to come to this life in mortality.

I wonder if I may just raise the question in your mind, were you aware that God had a master plan for you when you left his presence and you knew all about that plan? And if you did, have you bothered in the last while to learn much about it or to dig into it to find out what is there? The Church is big and complex, and it's hard to understand and live it in a way. On the other hand, you always go back to the fact that God has a plan; and that plan has to do with you and I leaving his presence, coming here, forgetting everything that happened and gaining a body. Because, to be gods, we had to have bodies. Once we got here, then we had to have a way to get back; and we had to come back on our own intuition, on our own agency. That's awfully important because he will not take your agency from you. You'll find that in your school work, in your business life and everything else. Your agency is the one thing that God gave to you that he does not claim still as his. I don't know if you knew that.

Each stage of my life has been deeply satisfying and tied to the gospel. In each of these periods within my lifetime, I have had satisfaction and joy because of the peculiar experiences that have been mine. In all cases, I have attempted to live my life to the fullest to make my life meaningful and rich.

One time I was asked, "If you were given the chance, Monte, would you want to live your life over again?" I said, "Oh no, I would not want to miss the opportunity that I had of being with my partner wife, with my children, and my

grandchildren, and with my friends and with all the people that I've had."

There have been many ditches that I've fallen in, but I wouldn't want to miss one of them because I have gained much that I'm sure helped me in this life and I hope will help me in the future.

I cherish and tingle all over when I think of the promises of my Father in Heaven. If I learn to keep all his commandments and the covenants of baptism, the use of the gift of the Holy Ghost, the covenants and the laws of sacrifice, the laws of the gospel, the laws of chastity, and the covenants of the laws of consecration—if I do all of these—then I as the patriarch of my family will be permitted to take my wife and my family back into the celestial kingdom and live forever in his presence.

I would like to label to you that Brother Lowell Bennion when he said "things that matter most," I would label that as one of the items that matters most in life. It's more important than your schooling. Now schooling is important, but what really counts first—what really matters most—is the thing that is going to last the eternities. I found that God had revealed in the scriptures instructions for me and told me all about this plan. The beautiful part of it is everything is spelled out. The purpose of life is all spelled out. A lot of people don't know that. The people who don't have the scriptures and the knowledge that we have in the Latter-day Saint gospel, are totally in the dark.

These things in the master plan of life that the Lord gave us we will find [in the scriptures]. I want you to write them down. We won't be going to them; but if you haven't done so, write down Alma 12:8-26; Alma 22:12, 22-26; Alma 42:1, 31, and you should read them every month. I won't tell you to read them every day, but read them every month because in that plan is your going to LDS Business College too. It's the whole plan of life; but it's the plan the way God has, the things that spiritually count. But as Brigham Young says, all truth is good. Everything we learn that is righteous and proper is good and is needed.

In Alma 12:8-26 he gives a detailed overview of the entire plan. Alma is telling his people—he's telling the people of LDS Business College—about this plan. In Alma 12:22-26 he tells what happened when he gave it to Adam also, and how it applied to Adam and how to apply it unto us. Then, just in case you missed it, in Alma 42:1-31, he goes through the whole thing. He gives you the whole plan of salvation, and again that is one of the things that matters most in life. With all that help and much more, how can you and I fail? We can't unless we are disobedient.

For me, I'm the kind of a person who says I have to have a little safety back here; I have to have a little security. I have to be sure that's right. My mind isn't so big that I can't when he says I have to keep his commandments. Well, his commandments are ever great, aren't they? Almost everything we

do in life applies to his commandments. If you sit down and say, well gee, I'm a sinner—I'm not doing things as I should—where do I start? I say to myself, gee, there has to be just one place in the holy scriptures that can help me and tell me how to model my life.

I did that with the idea that God felt it was good to have a written plan. Then I said Monte, you have to have a written plan—a plan of your life—and I labeled it my creed. I felt that without such a list of goals I would become like a boat without a rudder in the windstorm. You know what would happen to a boat out in the lake in the windstorm with no rudder? It would go to and fro in every direction. So, I developed some goals in this creed. I found in the scriptures first of all he says, "seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matt 6:33). He didn't say go to college first; he didn't say get married first; he didn't say all these other things. He said seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and all else so be added.

Now, I'm not done on these other things; I just mentioned them because they are part of the whole plan. If this is the case, then I felt I had to learn to have a love for the gospel. I had to have a love for Jesus Christ who is the head of this church. I found myself praying morning and noon and night and all day long to find out what I needed to do in these things. I needed to develop an unquenchable love for God and his son Jesus Christ. My love for God had to be always number one. I was not convinced of that. It shook me up to realize that unless I loved God and Christ foremost and first, even ahead of my family, it was not going to be a sufficient kind of love. That bothered me because this said that I had to put God ahead of my wife and my family. Is that really what it means—I had to put God ahead of my vocation, my job, my employer? He still had to come ahead of them. If I was wrong, that was a pretty costly error to be making.

At first that thought worried me. Soon in life I found that if I always put God and Jesus Christ first and his work in the Church, that he, my Maker, my Savior, always stepped in and made my family first with me. There is the key.

I've had many, many employees come to me and say, "I have things that I need to do in my family that come first ahead of my work." I say, "Yes, but if you ignore your work, what are you doing to your family?"

But by the same token, if you ignore the thing that matter most, and that is your pursuit of happiness of exaltation, what does it matter to have a great job and make millions of dollars? You're not going to take it with you. I found that by putting God first it automatically included my wife as I mentioned and my family. I found there wasn't any such thing as "can't" in my life. If I developed this kind of love for Christ, my actions toward my employer and my profession would not suffer. Again, in a way we would all be one in the Lord. That's the beautiful thing because if you are putting the Lord first, automatically you will find that it's like a great big

circle. The Lord is around it all; and if you're putting him first, he will not ignore one throughout the other.

This then had to be one of the most important goals and it had to always be first. I had to promise myself that I would never let school, work or play ever put love and loyalty to my church and God on the back burner. If you ever find yourself putting it on the back burner, get on your knees and go back and say I'd better take another look at things.

Finding the gospel to be ever so large then, I thought surely there must be one commandment that would help me through life. I could read it everyday, if necessary, and it would encompass everything. I found the Book of Mormon didn't let me down. I found a scripture already written for me to help me. It was written way back in the year 421 A.D. by a man named Moroni. If you have your scriptures—you may not have them with you, I don't know—I'm going to read from Moroni 7:44-48. I'm going to read 46, 47, 48. Listen to these beautiful words, and I think you will find here the key to everything that you can model in your life. Every decision you make, whether you are getting a job or what it is, see how it fits with this scripture. If it doesn't fit this scripture and let you permit it to be a part of your life, then I would say to you you'd better think again. Starting with verse 46, it says,

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—but charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him."

Do you see what he is saying there? He is saying (the pure love of Christ) if you don't have charity, there is no way to have the pure love of Christ.

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure" (Alma 7:48).

It would take you four minutes a day to read just those [three] verses and try to make your life model what he is saying we need to do there.

During the past 55 years of my life, since creating my first page of goals, this passage has always been number one on my list. It is a true goal or a creed of life to live by. It contains the entire gospel of love. I have been trying to exemplify and train myself in my daily habits to comply and be a model of what Moroni said about the pure love of Christ.

My wife and I have always tried to put this scripture at the center of our table morning, noon, night and as we kneel each evening in our nightly prayers. I might just make a little side note when I get done here. I might get over to you one thing that matters most. But, that one thing will be just like the heart of plenty. Does everybody here know what a heart of plenty is? How many of you know what a heart of plenty is? What does it do? It seems to spew forth all kinds of fruit, doesn't it? Well, if you learn to live the law of the gospel and learn to be like the Savior, you will find many of the things that will just become by-products.

We as a family have found that when we succeed in following Moroni's admonition of Christ's pure love, the Lord has blessed us more than we think we deserve. My sweet wife and my wonderful four children, one of whom went back to God some 21 years ago, have been blessed in ways and means one would never suspect. I cannot number or hold them, even in a little moment. God has led us and has permitted us to be tools in his hand for so many things to help build the kingdom of God here on the earth. And that's important.

I'll have to tell you (this is a side note) what I think is another thing that matters most. I don't think a day goes by that I don't ask God, Is there anything today that I can do to help you build your kingdom? I think that is important. That's vital because that is what we are here for; we are here to gain our own salvation. But, we are here also to build up the kingdom of God. He needs us. He wants us. He wants us to be gods. He wants us to do all these things. You're going to live in a day that is marvelous. I wish I was your age. I sat and I watched as we started our program, and I looked into your faces. I thought, gee, I wonder if I can remember what went through my mind at age 20 when I was here. Did I really realize all these things that I'm saying here? I will say this, that I was learning for the first time. I was learning the gospel. It was a great time for me to come to the LDS College because I wanted to be what I thought would be called a success in life. I don't think there is any such thing as just being a success in life. I think you have to be successful at a certain thing; but for me to say I have to be a success in life, it has to be something specific for it to really apply.

I have found that the more I do for the Lord, the more he does for me. You never will be able to give to the Lord faster than he can give to you. I find that when you're doing his work if you reach over to pick up a pebble and ask him to help you, you know what he does? He reaches over and picks up boulders and throws them. When that happens you know he is right by your side.

I soon found I needed to include all the covenants that I made to God in the temple, in my business life and with my employees. I found that I needed to make what I believed part of my life with my employees. I needed to treat them like I wanted to be treated. I'll never forget the one day when I

said to myself, I'm not going to let anybody come in my office and smoke. I don't like it, so why should I let them do it? Everybody thought I chased all my customers away, but it wasn't too many years later that the government started saying no more smoking in public places. I just beat them by a few months. It is so important to be a living example not only to your wife and children but to all those with whom you work and to all your customers.

I feel strongly that while trying to live the commandments of God you will find that other principles will arise that are needed to really prepare oneself in life. So, do not think that if you master the most important one that I just mentioned that you're finished, because it is the one that you can hang all of everything else on. God will let you know the others. I learned early on that putting the Church first and helping to build his kingdom here on earth first would be the capstone and the key of finding excellence in my life's work.

When I say I don't think there's anything such as being successful in life, I think what you're really saying is you want to find excellence in life. I find that if we are to establish Zion and strive to live the pure love of Christ, we cannot do it unless we learn charity. That's the key. There is so much in the scriptures on pride; and pride comes from selfishness, from inconsideration. The reverse of that is charity—to be open and want to give and help people. Repeating Moroni's chapter 47 again he says,

"But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him" (Moroni 7:47).

I may just as a sideline tell you after I joined the church—well not joined the Church, I was already in the Church—but when I found the Church I started reading all the things that were needed. I came to this item of tithing. Before I went in the Navy I was earning \$4.50 a week as a wage. In the Navy they gave me \$42.50 salary, but I was earning only \$4.50 when I went in the Navy. I said, "I am going to have to give 10 percent of my \$47.50? That's as much as I made totally before I went in the Navy." I said, "No way."

That was selfishness; I had learned to be selfish and not realized and not understood. I can say today that I learned as I pursued and went after this. I learned how beautiful the law of tithing is. It is only the stepping stone to living the gospel. Then you have the law of giving of excesses; you have the law of consecration. You need to give more than just tithing. At least as a starter, learn to give the law of tithing. It is hard to learn to be charitable and I already mentioned that. Oh, it was so hard, it was so hard, to give that \$4.20. I thought, oh what I can do with it? I don't really want. When I learned to want to give it, and learned to want to find ways to give more, and learned to find ways that the Lord would help me to have more to give more, that was when my life started to have meaning. That, my brothers and sisters, is what I want to get

over to you—learn the law of charity. If you learn the law of charity, you learn the law of love. If you learn the law of love, you're going to have the Savior right in your hand. You couldn't have a better person right there. For me, you will never know how hard it was. As I said, it was a lesson to live. I came from a home of poverty. We never earned enough to learn the law of tithing, even learn the law of the gospel. But it was moved that way.

Let us go for a moment to other testimonies on this thing. Jacob 2:17-19 says,

"Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you. But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted."

Today the Church has provided on your tithing receipt several other places to make gifts to the Church, to the poor and so forth, other than tithing. They're pretty strong words, aren't they? May I suggest to you that Jacob is not counseling you. Here is my main message to you here today as students. May I suggest to you that Jacob is not counseling you and I to do this after you gain your education. You don't put it on the back burner for after you establish your vocation, or after you get a good job or after you get married. He is advising you to learn how before you are tempted with wealth and become greedy and selfish. You need to learn that right now if you haven't learned it. You will be able to do that by putting the Lord first always, and always trying to keep your fellow men. Help to build the kingdom of God right now. You need to learn now, not later, how to give and be free with what the Lord gives you—whether it be a widow's mite or all the gold you can hold. Christ says if you keep my commandments you will have no need to worry. Until you and I learn to give our excess and experience and learn how to keep the laws of consecration, we will not be able to establish Zion—which is required of you and me.

Education in and of itself has no value at all. Does that make the building shudder here? The value of education is in the basis of what is the purpose of your education, what you do with it and how will you use it. That's what is important. The only thing we're going to take with us is knowledge, so all the things you learn here in school are the things you're going to be able to take with you on the other side. You can go out

tomorrow and earn \$100 [digging] a ditch. You won't take that five minutes with you anyplace.

Our present prophet, seer and revelator, President Gordon B. Hinckley, answers this in his article "The Quest for Excellence" in the September Ensign. He says in part,

"Tremendous is your opportunity to reach beyond the hoped for goal of wealth and worldly success, though that may have some modest importance" (p. 5).

What matters most is to build and strengthen others, to relieve the suffering, to aid in making the world a better place. This is real success in the world. God has said you are not entitled to inherit anything until you first have earned it.

Students, keep your life in balance and make sure you put things that matter most first. Be dependable and obedient. Learn to let your word be your bond. Above all, learn to be charitable and generous to your maker and his children. We all should be thankful for our very lives because they represent the sum total of every growing experience, every principle learned, every commandment kept unbroken and all of the love—whether received or given—in our life time.

Brigham Young once said, "It is our privilege to say every day in our lives that this is the best I have ever lived." This is the time given to each of us to do the work of this life—not tomorrow but now. Let us be committed not only to ourselves for self-improvement, but committed to the Lord. May we repent of those yesterdays and proceed toward tomorrows with a brightness of hope. May we be the very best we can each and every day as God gives us new life opportunities. I want to bear testimony to you that the gospel is true. It has been the backbone of everything I do and everything I have done. Hang on strong in all the tests that you'll have, you young people. Sometimes I look at some of the things that are going on and they worry me. I'll always remember President Romney when I was in the stake presidency. He came to a meeting once and everybody was telling him how bad the youth were in our stake at the time. Boy, they really had him convinced that the youth were going to fall apart. He stood up and said these words, "Yes, the youth of today are a royal generation. When they do anything bad, they do things bad you and I never thought of."

You look on television at everything going on around you and you can see that. But then he said this, and I will be speaking to you. He said, "When they do good, they do good things you and I never thought of." And then he said this, "The youth of today will live to see the Savior if they live righteously." I bear witness of this myself to you. I am privileged to be here.