

**Sure Foundation High School
Class of 2011**

**Charge to the Graduate,
*Brent A. Burford***

Prepared by
Dwight A. Burford
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Last Saturday morning Brent and I drove the two plus hours to Lawrence, Kansas, so he could join his teammates in competing in their final track meet of the season. It would also be Brent's last athletic event as a high school student.

As it came time for the runners to gather at the starting line for the 1600 meter (mile) run, my thoughts raced back to the start of the previous track season and to an e-mail Brent had sent me on March 5, 2010. It read:

Friday, March 5, 2010 2:32 PM

Heya Dad!

I just thought of the date of my crash:

3. 2. 1(.) 0 KAPOW!!!!

Thanks a lot for helpin out and all with the car stuff--and for bein such a great dad!

Brent

On March 2, 2010 (3.2.1.0), three days prior to sending his e-mail, Brent had been in a car wreck while driving to the second track practice of the year. In a 45 mile an hour speed zone, a car in the oncoming traffic crossed over Brent's lane and then swerved back towards him, crashing into him on a bridge and leaving him injured and dazed. (Later we would learn that the blood alcohol content of the driver of the other vehicle was nearly three times the legal limit.) So, instead of running with the team, Brent found himself recuperating at home alone the rest of the season.

When Brent first called home to let us know about the wreck, he said he thought he might have totaled the car. Upon arriving on the scene, Pam and I could see how his initial assessment of the damage to our car could have qualified for the understatement of the year. Much of the car was severely smashed and contorted from the impact with the other car and the subsequent impact with the concrete railing of the bridge.

In reviewing the sequence of events of the collision with him, Brent told us of how he had blacked out following the impact but awoke praying with an assurance that God had preserved his life for a purpose. Then, several days later, notwithstanding being in a car wreck and realizing the prospect of losing the whole track season, Brent was able to share with me his sense of gratitude for the help he had received and a unique way of viewing the date of the crash.

Brent's e-mail message put things into perspective for me as well. Brent would be okay. He would be able to weather the adversity we often experience in this life. He could take such a significant setback and yet see the road ahead with a positive and even a witty attitude. In looking back over the year since the wreck, I was indeed grateful to God for bringing Brent through such an ordeal and enabling him run with the track team this year.

When the starter's gun sounded, my thoughts quickly returned to the present and to the race in which Brent was now engaged. He would finish third in the 1600 meter run. He had participated in the race with two of his teammates and was skillfully guided and encouraged by his experienced teammate and friend, Johnny, with whom he had played soccer in seasons past.

At the conclusion of the race, the Apostle Paul's triumphant exclamation to Timothy came to mind:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (II Timothy 4:7,8)

Though Paul suffered many trials and setbacks in his life and ministry,¹ he remained faithful to Jesus Christ by pressing forward in his *course* (race) to obtain a crown of righteousness.² Reflecting back on the events of both the past and present seasons while watching Brent run, I could see a similar form of determination budding within my son.

It was a tough run for Brent. It was only his second competitive 1600 meter race, and he had started it with sore and blistered feet. Notwithstanding such hurdles, equipped with a new strategy and propelled by a desire to run an even better race than his first, Brent would finish the race exhausted but with a personal best time of 4 minutes 55 seconds.

When Brent initially expressed an interest in running, I hoped he would come to know the joy and satisfaction that I knew while running back in my high school days. I hoped he would experience the camaraderie forged with teammates and coaches through participating in workouts and meets together – the sense of accomplishment, of improving your personal best times, of meeting the challenge of the discipline of the sport, of enduring exertion to finish your course.

Watching Brent warm down with his teammates the prior week after his first competitive 1600, it was evident that he had come to sense this joy and satisfaction. He had tasted what I and other runners have known. It would renew his purpose for running again this weekend. Though hindered by significant setbacks, Brent would again rise above his circumstances and run well the race before him. He would not just finish his course, though. He would do so pressing toward the finish line doing his best.

¹ II Corinthians 11:24-33

² Philippians 3:8-15

Brent, events like those that occurred on March 2, 2010, causing significant setbacks in your life can and may happen throughout your life. However, just as God was with you then, He promises to be with you always because He cares for you.³ But what He is doing with and in your life through such events may not always be apparent.⁴ Just know this: God does intend to work in your life according to His will and His good pleasure to bring about an expected end in your life, namely your eternal life with Him in His kingdom.⁵

To illustrate the importance of trusting God, especially when faced with tough decisions in your life, I would like to share a lesson with you that the Lord taught me a few years after our family moved to Wichita. It is a lesson that has helped keep the walk of faith in perspective for me.

One night I was awakened to a perplexing situation in my mind. I saw myself stuck in a maze, a confusing labyrinth with many turns, intersections, and dead ends. I would start down one path only to find it necessary to turn down another. In one way I felt as if I had been left to wander alone in this maze, to pick my path through it in a somewhat haphazard manner. In another way, I felt as if I was being guided along an arbitrary, zigzag path. Though I wanted to negotiate as straight a course as possible, I seemed to be constantly turned to the right or to the left into new and unfamiliar passageways.

Yes, I could definitely identify with the scene that had formed in my mind. It captured the essence of how I felt: confused and frustrated. I was growingly becoming unsure of myself and the direction I was receiving. Viewing my circumstances now as an observer seemed to confirm that, if left to myself, it would take a lot of trial and error attempts on my part to eventually find my way through this maze. Still, I felt as if I must continue to try to make my way through it.

As I thought on the scene before me, I became aware that the Lord was using this experience to reveal to me His awareness of my feelings and my growing sense of frustration and futility with trying to navigate my way through the complex situation facing me in my life. Then He expanded my view of the scene before me. Up and to the right of the maze a straight path appeared. I saw myself at one end with the Lord standing at the other, inviting me to come to Him. Unlike the maze, which appeared dimly lit and filled with shadows, this new path was bright and well lit.⁶

Along with the added view of this straight path came the understanding that the maze was my view of the situation I was facing. The straight, well-lit path was my Lord's view of it. Why the difference? To me, the Lord's instructions seemed to be taking me through a maze, full of turns to the right and to the left. From the Lord's perspective, He was leading me in the straight course that leads to Him.

You see, the dark, shadowy maze represented how my natural tendencies were clouding my vision and making other paths – dark ones off of and away from the straight path – seem easier and more attractive and thus more appropriate to me. As it is written:

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.
(Proverbs 14:12)

O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct

³ Hebrews 13:5 & I Peter 5:7 with Psalm 73:22-25

⁴ Romans 8:26-28

⁵ Philippians 2:12,13 with Romans 6:1-23

⁶ I John 1:5-2:3

his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. (Jeremiah 10:23,24)

The turning effect I was experiencing was the Good Shepherd guiding me, sometimes firmly, back onto the well-lit path and ultimately back to Him. I had mistaken the Lord's correction to my wayward tendencies for a confusing labyrinth of instruction and guidance. I had failed to see the Lord's intervention in my life for what it truly was, a gift that was meant to keep me traveling in *wisdom's path*.⁷

Now, with an expanded view that included the bright, well-lit path, I could see how God knew exactly where I was and where I needed to go in order for me to come to Him and be received by Him into eternal life. His guidance was not meant to confuse me. Rather it was being given to bring me back into His will. With this fuller view of my circumstance, my Lord was giving me an opportunity to live in a renewed appreciation and gratitude for His instruction and intercession in my life.

Brent, if ever you become confused by God's direction in your life, or if ever you wonder why it is that God appears to be leading you one direction when another way seems better or more appropriate to you, please yield to Him while remembering that God's ways are not our ways; His thoughts are much higher than our thoughts.⁸ Remember also that *all we like sheep* have strayed from Him, having a natural tendency to wander away from Him and His paths of righteousness.⁹ This is why we desperately need the guidance and direction of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.¹⁰

In the gift of His Son, God has provided *a more excellent way* for us to live our lives.¹¹ This *more excellent way* includes three very special gifts that God gives to us through Jesus Christ.¹² They are faith, hope, and charity.

For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (I Corinthians 13:12,13)

Briefly comprehended, in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, God has given us the opportunity to live by faith, hope, and charity as opposed to remaining carnal, sensual, and devilish. Through these three *excellent* gifts, our Lord brings forth from our lives the fruits of His Spirit, which He calls *the fountain of all righteousness*.¹³ Each gift is an antidote for the different elements of our fallen nature, which became carnal, sensual, and devilish through the fall of Adam.¹⁴

Faith, specifically *the faith of the gospel*,¹⁵ is the antidote for the *carnal mind*, which the Apostle Paul wrote is *enmity against God*.¹⁶ The carnal mind relies upon its own capacities,

⁷ Helaman 4:55

⁸ Isaiah 55:6-11

⁹ Isaiah 53:6 with Romans 3:23

¹⁰ Isaiah 53:6 with John 10:11-18

¹¹ Ether 5:12

¹² I Corinthians 12:31

¹³ Ether 5:29 with Ephesians 5:9; see also D&C 16:4d with John 15:5

¹⁴ Mosiah 8:74-76 & Alma 19:91 with I John 2:16, Romans 5:12-21, Romans 8:5-9, James 3:14,15, Galatians 6:7,8, Colossians 1:21, etc.

¹⁵ Philippians 1:27 with Jude 1:3

resources, and intuition. It attempts to confine the world around it to its own limited intelligence, assessments, and understandings. The carnal mind may utilize skill and training, but it relies more upon its own logic, observations, perspective, and traditions. It does not ask of God. It does not counsel with Him. Rather, it relies upon *the arm of flesh*.¹⁷ The faith of the gospel, on the other hand, relies completely upon God and His revealed word. It is rooted in God's integrity and His perfect and complete understanding of all things and is thus led by Him. Faith is established in and by the revelation of God's word of truth given to us so that we may come to know Him and to live according to His will for our lives.¹⁸ Faith looks to God and His purposes in creating us. Through faith we come to trust in God's Incarnate Word of Truth, His Only Begotten Son whom He caused to become flesh and to dwell among us.¹⁹ Specifically, through faith we come to trust in the words of Jesus Christ, the One by whom God spoke all of creation into existence and by whom He maintains all things.²⁰ Thus, by faith in Jesus Christ, God enables us to rise infinitely above our fallen state to embrace His word of truth and to become righteous before Him – to become holy even as He is holy.²¹ And so it is written, *the just shall live by his faith*.²²

Hope in Jesus Christ²³ is the antidote for our sensual nature. Our sensual (fallen) nature wants, and even demands, those things that please our flesh and natural desires, and it wants it *now*. It resists and even refuses to wait for an appropriate time or way for us to find fulfillment and satisfaction for our bodily needs and appetites. It seeks to serve itself while ignoring the constraint of God's Spirit and the guidance that comes through His word. Hope, on the other hand, waits patiently upon the Lord according to His timing and purpose.²⁴ Its aim is not to fulfill the fleshly desires of our bodies. Rather, through hope we set our hearts upon eternal things, those things that are from above, which are in heavenly places where our Lord awaits.²⁵ Hope is an abiding prayer of the heart, and it is through the hope to be like Jesus Christ that we purify ourselves and await His return to establish His kingdom of righteousness upon the earth.²⁶ Thus it is written, *we are saved by hope*.²⁷

Charity, specifically the charity which is *the pure love of Jesus Christ*,²⁸ is the antidote for the devilish part of our fallen nature. Recall how the devil, who is the master of sin, is called *the accuser of the brethren*.²⁹ He is filled with hate and a desire to destroy others and thus is a murderer before God.³⁰ Likewise, our fallen nature often expresses itself in a devilish way by accusing or blaming others. It not only focuses on finding fault with others, but it

¹⁶ Romans 8:7

¹⁷ Jeremiah 17:5 with II Nephi 3:61-66

¹⁸ Romans 10:6-17

¹⁹ John 1:10-16 with John 14:6

²⁰ Colossians 1:9-29 with John 14:6

²¹ I Peter 1:14-16

²² Habakkuk 2:4 with Romans 1:17 & Galatians 2:20

²³ Romans 8:24, I John 3:1-3, I Peter 3:15, I Timothy 1:1, Jeremiah 17:7, etc.

²⁴ Galatians 5:5 with Isaiah 40:31

²⁵ Colossians 3:1-4

²⁶ I John 3:1-3 & Moroni 7:53

²⁷ Romans 8:24

²⁸ Moroni 7:49-53 with I Corinthians 13:1-13

²⁹ Revelation 12:10

³⁰ John 8:44 with II Nephi 1:101-103 & Matthew 5:23-31

also places blame on them to justify itself at their expense.³¹ Thus, a devilish nature expresses itself in *beating* its fellow servants.³² Our fallen nature also seeks to bring others down into subjection to our wills and vain pursuits. It often relies on lies to get its way or to cover its tracks.³³ Charity, on the other hand, is not so minded. Rather, it rejoices in the truth and finds fulfillment in doing God's will. Thus it is written, *charity edifies*.³⁴ It builds up others in the Lord, even at its own expense.³⁵

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things,, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth ... (I Corinthians 13:4-8)

Brent, when you find yourself at a crossroad where decisions must be made in order for you to progress in your journey, remember to seek earnestly these three special gifts. Remember them especially in those times in which you may feel like going one way and yet sense that God is leading you in a different direction or into another path. In such times, yield to God and His instructions in your life. Why? We are His workmanship.³⁶ He knows what He is doing in our lives, and He does it very well. Our salvation is His passion.³⁷ So, while gazing out into the vast universe at night, or when viewing his wondrous creation through the lens of the best photographic equipment you may acquire, remember: this is our Lord's *work and glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man*.³⁸ By creating you in His image, God predestined you to be like Him, to be even as He is.³⁹ Remember further that it is by Jesus Christ that God will finish His work in your life.⁴⁰

In conclusion, Brent, I would like to leave you with the following counsel found in the scriptures regarding running the race of life.

Know ye not that they which run in a race all run, but only one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. (1 Corinthians 9:24)

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us... (Hebrews 12:1)

Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves – to choose the way of everlasting death, or the way of eternal life. Wherefore my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God and not to the will of the devil and the flesh. And

³¹ Isaiah 29:31

³² Matthew 24:55

³³ John 8:44

³⁴ I Corinthians 8:1

³⁵ John 15:13,14

³⁶ Ephesians 2:10

³⁷ John 13:1 & Luke 22:15

³⁸ D&C 22:23b

³⁹ Genesis 1 with I Peter 1:16

⁴⁰ Philippians 1:6

remember, that after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved; Wherefore, may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God, that ye may praise Him through grace divine. Amen. (II Nephi 7:40-44)

I love you Brent.

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; The lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)