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11

Emerging Adulthood:
A Time to Prepare for One's "Ministries" in Life

A T the beginning of my doctoral studies at a large school in the eastern United States, I met some fellow students and introductions ensued. From our conversation they discovered that I was 26 years old and seeking a graduate degree while already married and the father of two children. With disbelief and a hint of disdain that I was already married and a father, one of my peers blurted out, "You are a fool!" I have told that story several times in professional settings, and people are usually in complete agreement that I was not a typical 26-year-old in the United States.

In the present Western culture, most young people between the ages of 18 and 27 do not get married, have children, or settle into a career. In fact, in the United States, the average age of marriage has reached an all-time high—28 for males and 26 for females (US Census Bureau, 2010). As a result of these demographic changes, the late teens to mid-to-late twenties is a time period focused on the individual and is characterized as the time to explore possible life directions in areas such as education, work, relationships, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). Given society's view of what is "normal" today, it is understandable that many Latter-day Saint young people feel a great deal of opposition as they make their way into adulthood.

The late teens to mid-to-late twenties is a time period focused on the individual and is characterized as the time to explore possible life directions in areas such as education, work, relationships, and worldviews. © Rido.

It is also easy to see why parents feel an increase in pressure to assist their children in successfully navigating the pitfalls of this age period. So what can young people (and parents alike, see chapter 12) do during this time of intense change and challenge? The purpose of this chapter is to help young people have a proper perspective of what this period of their lives is about and how best to use this time to prepare for future adult roles, including, but not limited to, marriage.

Emerging Adulthood

As noted, the years between 18 and 27 look very different today compared to this period of development in past decades in Western cultures such as the United States. Indeed, one of the most unique aspects of this developmental period is the ambivalence that young people have about their status as adults. Numerous studies have shown that few young people this

age consider themselves to be adults yet (Arnett, 1998; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007). Parents tend to concur with this assessment of not-yet adulthood (Nelson et al., 2007). Given these perceptions, the term "emerging adulthood" has been coined (Arnett, 2000) to capture this in-between status of no longer being an adolescent but not yet feeling completely like an adult.

In studying the unique features of this period of life, researchers (Arnett, 2004) have characterized emerging adulthood as including five important features. First, it is an *age of feeling in-between*, as most emerging adults do not see themselves as either an adolescent or an adult. Second, emerging adulthood is an *age of possibilities*, as most young people are extremely optimistic and have high hopes for the future. Third, this period of development is an *age of instability* because it tends to be marked by instability in work, relationships, education, and residential status. Next, emerging adulthood is characterized as an *age of identity exploration* because many emerging adults are free to explore identities in the areas of education, work, love, and worldviews. Finally, emerging adulthood is a *self-focused age of life.* This is not meant to suggest that emerging adults are necessarily self-centered; rather, they are free from social obligations and other responsibilities that allow for a productive focus on the self.

As part of the exploration, instability, experimentation, and self-focus that are typical for this age period, a number of trends, many of them disturbing, are now prevalent during emerging adulthood. More and more young people are engaging in premarital intercourse (see Regnerus & Uecker, 2011), and cohabitation is preceding more than half of all marriages in the United States (Whitehead & Popenoe, 2001). It is taking longer for emerging adults to finish their education (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adulthood is the peak period for risk behaviors such as binge drinking, experimenting with drugs, and unprotected sex (Arnett, 2000). For example, in a report on drinking patterns, college-age males were overrepresented in the groups high in alcohol usages (Schulenberg & Maggs, 2001). Another trend seen in emerging adulthood is that dating in the more traditional sense has

been replaced by "hanging out and hooking up" (for instance, hanging out with a group and then pairing off for uncommitted sexual relationships). One study reported that "only 50% of college women seniors reported having been asked on six or more dates by men since coming to college, and a third of women surveyed said they had been asked on two dates or fewer" (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001, p. 5). Finally, many emerging adults hold pessimistic views about marriage (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 2009). A negative view of marriage and a desire to postpone it until the late twenties or even thirties has been found to be linked with numerous harmful behaviors during emerging adulthood (for example, see Carroll, Willoughby, Badger, Nelson, Barry, & Madsen, 2007).

Taken together, the negative attitude towards marriage and family and the harmful behaviors that young people tend to engage in during this period of life might best be summarized as an approach of "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you will marry." These attitudes and behaviors make up the society in which Latter-day Saint emerging adults are living, working, attending school, and, in general, trying to make correct choices. It is not easy for them to stay on gospel paths as they transition into adult roles, but it is possible and important that they do so.

Implications for Latter-day Saint Emerging Adults

Understanding the period of emerging adulthood is important in order to better grasp the context in which young Latter-day Saints are making the transition to adulthood, and thereby assist them. They are receiving very con-flicting messages from their religious community versus the larger society in which they live. From the media, peers, and other sources, they hear the mes-sage that marriage should be the furthest thing from their minds and that they should behave as though they are only young once and therefore should engage in as many "now-or-never" behaviors as possible (Ravert, 2009). Ravert examined the behaviors young people engaged in because they thought they would not be able to do them later in life after they had settled down as adults.

The most common theme that emerged was travel/adventure, followed by social events, alcohol/tobacco/drug use, relationships (for example, multiple sexual experiences), carefree lifestyle (such as being lazy, enjoying not having a real job), sports/action, academic/career (being able to change schools or change jobs), and independence/personal expression (2009).

Again, these findings highlight the message of the culture that surrounds young Latter-day Saints today. Unfortunately, some of these cultural values and behaviors are affecting too many Latter-day Saints, causing them to stray from gospel paths. As adolescents and emerging adults, a percentage of Latter-day Saint young people have participated in acts of delinquency (for example, offenses against people or property), cheating in school, risk behaviors (such as alcohol and drug use), and pornography use (Chadwick, Top, & McClendon, 2010; Nelson Padilla-Walker, & Carroll, 2010). In sum, although doing better as a group than their non–Latter-day Saint peers, Latter-day Saint emerging adults are not immune from the larger culture's views of what this time period should be about.

Unfortunately, not all of the challenges facing Latter-day Saint emerging adults come solely from outside influences. Many young people receive negative messages and pressure from within the Latter-day Saint community. Well-intentioned but misguided pressure from members of a ward or community may lead many emerging adults to feel uncomfortable or become casual in attending church. For example, my female students tell me story after story of returning home after a semester at Brigham Young University and attending church with their families only to be peppered with questions, jokes, and comments related to their empty ring finger or slothfulness in getting engaged. Again, much of this occurs in the context of good-natured kidding, but far too often it leads to discomfort, sadness, and self-doubt within the emerging adults. Another result is a broader level of misunderstanding among the Latter-day Saint culture of just what the focus of this time period should be. Therefore, a good starting point for the healthy transition into adult roles is for young people (as well as parents and leaders) to understand the purpose of this age period.

Preparing for Our Ministries

Many within our religious community are often given the false impression that the *only* purpose of emerging adulthood is to marry and start a family. If this is the case, then every day that young people wake up unmarried, they will feel a sense of failure. Furthermore, not everybody will marry in their twenties, if at all during this life. Parents and young people should see this time as a time to *prepare* for marriage (and other important "ministries" that I will discuss later). Then, whether individuals marry at age 20, 25, 30, or later, they can still feel assured that their actions are preparing them to choose a spouse. We all need to remember that there is no set age by which one *must* be married. Rather, President Gordon B. Hinckley (1999) counseled to "marry the right person in the right place at the right time" (p. 2).

In taking the approach that emerging adulthood is a time to prepare to marry rather than a time to marry, I do not wish to diminish the importance of marriage in any way. President Hinckley (1997) declared, "The most important decision of life is the decision concerning your companion" and Elder M. Russell Ballard (2012) recently admonished young people to "pay careful attention to finding your eternal companion," (p. 100). Young people should not unduly delay marrying, as it is indeed the most important undertaking of one's life (see Monson, 2011; Oaks, 2011; and Scott, 2011; these talks are from the April 2011 general conference that specifically admonishes young men to not delay marriage). My purpose in taking the approach that emerging adulthood is a time to prepare to marry is meant to help young people be better prepared for making and keeping the marriage covenant. Furthermore, it is meant to help young people be prepared for the demands of all aspects of adulthood, especially for those who through no fault of their own find themselves not married. In sum, this approach is not meant to devalue the importance of eternal marriage but to acknowledge its sacredness by the preparations we make for it in our lives leading up to it.

With the perspective that emerging adulthood is a time to prepare to marry as opposed to a time that they *must* marry, young people can view

every day as an opportunity to prepare for future roles including, but not limited to, that of spouse. We know very little about the Savior's emerging adult years except that he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). During emerging adulthood, young people should emulate the Savior and focus on these four areas of their lives (wisdom, stature, favor with other people, and favor with God).

Wisdom

First, emerging adults should make strides to grow in wisdom. They should read from the "best books words of wisdom" and "seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118). They should pursue as much education as possible. In a general Young Women meeting, Mary N. Cook (2012) quoted President Hinckley and his charge to the youth of the Church regarding the pursuit of knowledge:

> The pattern of study you establish during your formal schooling will in large measure affect your lifelong thirst for knowledge. . . . You must get all of the education that you possibly can. . . . Sacrifice anything that is needed to be sacrificed to qualify yourselves to do the work of [this] world. . . . Train your minds and hands to become an influence for good as you go forward with your lives. (p. 120)

Lest some think this counsel applies only to young men, President Hinckley (2001) has given the following counsel specifically to young women:

> Find purpose in your life. Choose the things you would like to do, and educate yourselves to be effective in their pursuit. For most it is very difficult to settle on a vocation. You are hopeful that you will marry and that all will be taken care of. In this day and time, a girl needs an education. She needs the means and skills by which to

Emerging adults should pursue as much education as possible. Mark A. Philbrick, © BYU Photo.

earn a living should she find herself in a situation where it becomes necessary to do so. (p. 95)

Both of these quotes speak to men and women about the necessity of getting the best education possible and developing the skills needed to earn a living. Emerging adulthood is the critical time to acquire the skills that are necessary to become financially self-reliant. Research shows the economic challenges facing young people today. For example, in 1969, 23.1% of 25-year-old men earned less than those in poverty. However, in 2004, it took until age 30 for there to be "only" 23.2% of the age group below the poverty line (Danziger & Rouse, 2007). In other words, this research shows that it is taking longer for young people, young men in particular, to earn enough money to support a family. In order to demonstrate the role that obtaining an education can have in preparing individuals to earn an income, the following table displays the average income for men and women, respectively, ages 25–34 with varying levels of education.

Table 1. Average Earnings in Dollars of Year-Round, Full-Time Workers Ages 25 to 34 Years by Educational Attainment, 2009.

	Males	Females
Less than 9th grade	$25,067	$18,278
9th to 12th grade (no diploma)	27,074	21,996
High school graduate	38,037	27,993
Some college, no degree	44,020	32,229
Associate's degree	48,313	36,202
Bachelor's degree or more	67,555	52,102

Source: US Census Bureau. (2010, September). Income, poverty and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2009, Current population reports *(Series P60-238, and Detailed Tables—Table PINC-04). Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/ compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0703.pdf*

In sum, the evidence suggests that the requisite skills to earn a sufficient income comes from education received during emerging adulthood (for instance, college education, vocational training) rather than during adolescence (that is, high school). Hence, emerging adults may leave themselves unprepared for ministries (for example, providing for a family, having a career) if they choose to postpone, or avoid altogether, the pursuit of knowledge (strictly speaking, education) during emerging adulthood. Although I have focused on the importance of getting a college education, there are certainly other ways to acquire forms of knowledge that will enable one to become financially capable of caring for a family, including vocational schools, apprenticeships, and job-training programs. Regardless of the pathway one takes, the emphasis needs to be on acquiring knowledge and skills during emerging adulthood that will equip the person for long-term stability (not just short-term income) within his or her adult roles.

A final note is needed on the importance of following our Savior's example of growing in wisdom. Although acquiring an education plays a central role in the preparation to earn a living, the blessings that accompany the acquisition

of knowledge extend well beyond the ability to make money. For example, attending college has been linked to a number of other positive outcomes including better critical thinking skills, greater participation in political and community activities, a more positive self-image, and greater interpersonal and intellectual competence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rabow, Choi, & Purdy, 1998). In other words, an education can broaden ideas, insights, and abilities to relate to others and make important decisions. An education will help one think more clearly and make wise choices. Emerging adults who seek knowledge will have more tools at their disposal for problems that arise in their lives, including problems in their marriages and among their families.

Caring for Bodies

Second, just as the Savior "increased in . . . stature," emerging adults should give attention to their physical bodies. This does not simply mean to "grow up" physically. Rather, we are taught to care for our bodies in order to provide our spirits with a proper mortal dwelling. As noted previously, heavy drinking, alcohol-related problems, drug use, and risky sexual behaviors (such as number of sexual partners, low or improper use of condoms) often reach some of the highest levels during emerging adulthood (for examples, see Bachman, Johnston, O'Malley, & Schulenberg, 1996; Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006; Schulenberg & Maggs, 2001). All of these behaviors are spiritually damaging, but they also pose serious threats to the health of the physical body. Therefore, the law of chastity and the Word of Wisdom are particularly important anchors for Latter-day Saint young people in maintaining both spiritual and physical well-being.

Drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex are not the only common issues during emerging adulthood that go against the charge to care for our bodies. Among those ages 18 to 25, approximately 36% of individuals have a tattoo and 30% have pierced their bodies in a place other than their ear lobe (Pew Research Center, 2007). Although an exact prevalence rate is difficult to pin down because of its private nature, estimates of adolescents

and emerging adults who engage in self-harm (for instance, intentional harm to one's body without suicidal intent such as cutting, burning, or self-bruising) range from 4% to 38% (Briere & Gil, 1998; Favazza, 1996; Gratz, Conrad, & Roemer, 2002; Muehlenkamp & Guiterrez, 2004). It has been found that an alarming 25% of college-attending women engage in binging and purging (throwing up or using laxatives) as a weight-management strategy (The Renfrew Center Foundation for Eating Disorders, 2013). In sum, emerging adulthood is a time during which the health of and respect for the physical body is under attack.

Fortunately, the majority of Latter-day Saints are able to avoid the more obvious and serious threats to physical well-being. Our own data, drawn from a sample of active Latter-day Saint college students, shows that fewer than 5% engage in drug use, drinking, smoking, or self-harm, respectively (Nelson, 2012). Again, the sample from which these numbers are drawn does not capture the full range of Latter-day Saint young people. The numbers also are not meant to suggest it is always easy for young people to avoid these temptations or to downplay the challenges faced by those who may be struggling with addictions, eating disorders, or other challenges mentioned previously. However, the numbers do suggest that the challenges facing young people in regard to caring for their physical bodies may come in more subtle forms as they strive to prepare for future adult roles.

When I ask students in my classes about the challenges they face in regard to caring for their bodies, there are always some that squirm uncomfortably in their chairs and express a look of understanding on their faces as they begin to respond. One of their first answers is always about controlling their schedules and choices in order to get enough sleep. They talk about relying on substances such as energy drinks that are not expressly forbidden by the Word of Wisdom but are not particularly good for the body either. Indeed, our own data shows that approximately 20% of young men and nearly 10% of young women use energy drinks at least once a month. My students admit that often the use of these substances is to compensate for their poor choices regarding sleep. Students also

Students face many challenges in regards to taking care of their bodies. One of the most common challenges is controlling their schedules and choices in order to get enough sleep. © Nyul.

describe the challenges of eating a healthy diet, finding time to exercise, and managing stress. Thus emerging adulthood is certainly a time for young people to begin to form habits that will help them develop and maintain the health and vigor needed to fulfill the physically demanding requirements of adult roles (for example, running a household, caring for children, earning a living).

Finally, young people, especially women, should be cautious about the numerous terrible messages they get about their bodies. Many individuals believe that physical beauty is of utmost importance in life. This may be why over 51% of Latter-day Saint young women in our study admitted to avoiding food once a month to several times a month in order to lose weight (Nelson, 2012). As taught in the scriptures, we all need to come to know that the most important aspect about us is not our external qualities but rather our internal characteristics (see 1 Samuel 16:7). Emotional suffering

can afflict individuals who place too much emphasis on physical appearance. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland (2005) cautioned:

> I plead with you young women to please be more accepting of yourselves, including your body shape and style, with a little less longing to look like someone else. We are all different. Some are tall, and some are short. Some are round, and some are thin. And almost everyone at some time or other wants to be something they are not! But as one adviser to teenage girls said: "You can't live your life worrying that the world is staring at you. When you let people's opinions make you self-conscious you give away your power. . . . The key to feeling [confident] is to always listen to your inner self— [the real you]." (p. 29)

It is a common practice in today's fashion industry to take pictures of models and improve them via computer technology. As a result, the finished product that we see on magazine covers is not a real person. The model who had his or her photograph taken does not in reality look like the image on the magazine. Satan has successfully made it so that many people strive for beauty that cannot be attained and, therefore, has caused individuals to feel poorly about themselves. Instead of reaching for such unattainable goals, young people should see that beauty comes from working on having a beautiful interior or heart, because that is attainable and can be seen in one's countenance. In summary, emerging adulthood is a time during which there is quite an extensive attack on the physical body. Learning to care for the physical body that we have each been given is an important stewardship. The body will be essential in fulfilling one's ministry as spouse, parent, provider, protector, and in other adult roles and responsibilities. Therefore, emerging adults should set goals to care for their bodies through healthy diet and exercise, sensible sleep schedules, modest dress, and avoidance of things that would harm or otherwise desecrate their bodies in any way.

Emerging adults should cultivate the invaluable abilities to communicate, listen, empathize, understand the perspectives of others, control their tempers, and think how their actions will affect themselves and others. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Social Competence

Third, just as the Savior grew in "favour with . . . man" (Luke 2:52), emerging adults should work on their social skills and relationships with other people. They should cultivate the invaluable abilities to communicate, listen, empathize, understand the perspectives of others, control their tempers, and think how their actions will affect themselves and others. These abilities will help them interact with others and will better prepare them for marriage. If emerging adults use this time in their lives to work on these attributes, they will be well on their way to becoming prepared for future roles especially that of spouse.

The big question is how can individuals develop these interpersonal skills? They must be practiced. However, in an era in which face-to-face interactions have been replaced with social networking technology (for example,

through phones and computers), and one-on-one dating has gone the way of simply hanging out (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001), there are fewer contexts where young people can practice and develop the skills needed for the formation and maintenance of successful relationships.

So again the question may be asked, how and where should young people learn these skills? Certainly an initial and important response is "on a mission." While there is no doubt that a mission helps in developing social competence, even a mission does not provide all of the skills necessary to succeed in marriage. Learning to communicate with a companion of the same sex, although important in the overall learning-to-communicate process, is not the same as communicating with a member of the opposite sex. Therefore, young people need to be proactive in placing themselves in one-on-one settings with members of the opposite sex as a way of developing and practicing the skills that will prepare them for marriage. Dating is the ideal setting for the acquisition and honing of these skills. Young people should actively date as a way to find out their strengths and weaknesses (to improve upon them) and the type of person with whom they want to make temple covenants.

It is important to reiterate how careful we need to be regarding the accuracy of the message we convey to young people. When adult members of the Church tell emerging adults they need to date in order to marry, many young people who do not yet feel ready to marry (for example, they do not yet feel they have the communication skills and other skills needed to be successful in marriage) may think they need to stop dating until they are ready to marry. In doing so, they stop doing the very thing that will help them prepare. This is why it is so important to understand that dating to marry is just *one* of many reasons to date. When we see emerging adulthood as a time to prepare for marriage, dating will be viewed by many Latter-day Saint emerging adults as much less ominous.

By dating, emerging adults can begin to prepare for marriage in a number of ways. First, dating provides young people the opportunity to observe in their dates the skills and abilities (or lack thereof) they may wish to either

Dating is the ideal setting for acquiring and practicing communication and other skills needed in marriage. Christina Smith, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

incorporate into their own social interactions (such as, listening, empathy, eye contact, verbal give-and-take, humor, the ability to generate new topics of conversation) or *eliminate* from their own behaviors (for example, talking only about oneself, excessive sarcasm). In other words, the process of dating will help make emerging adults aware of the areas in which they need to practice on subsequent dates.

Indeed, a second important purpose of dating is to provide individuals the opportunity to practice communication and other important relationship skills. Researchers have pointed at communication as being an important determinant in relationship satisfaction (see Meeks, Hendrick, S., & Hendrick, C., 1998; Troy, 2000). Specifically, they have pointed out the importance of aspects of communication such as engaging in eye contact, listening, allowing one's partner to talk, asking questions, expressing empathy, and, self-disclosing information as appropriate (for examples, see Davis & Oathout, 1987; Prager, 2000; Sprecher & Hendrick, S., 2004).

Therefore, dating provides a setting in which young people can develop and improve skills that they will need, most importantly, in their roles as spouses and parents, but also in the work place, callings within their wards and stakes, and roles within their communities.

Finally, dating helps young people learn to commit. By going on dates, young people practice committing to another individual by giving the individual their full attention. Some things that people can do to show their focused attention (i.e., commitment) would include being devoted to that person's interests, needs, and welfare over their own and would exclude personal distractions, such as their phones.

President Hinckley (1995) stated: "When you are married, be fiercely loyal one to another. Selfishness is the great destroyer of happy family life. If you will make your first concern the comfort, the well-being, and the happiness of your companion, sublimating any personal concern to that loftier goal, you will be happy, and your marriage will go on throughout eternity" (p. 67). Although this statement pertains specifically to marriage, dating provides the opportunity to practice placing the comfort, well-being, and happiness of another person above one's own for a couple of hours so that he or she is better prepared to do so within the covenant relationship of marriage.

In sum, a date with a particular person may not lead to marriage or even another date with that person, but that is not the only purpose of the date. It is important to understand that dating serves multiple important purposes for emerging adults, including helping them build important social skills and practice the ability to commit that will help them better prepare themselves to be able to "marry the right person at the right time in the right place." There are certainly other ways in which young people can and should develop communication and other relationship skills, including reading books on the topic, taking college and institute classes that focus on relationship skills, and observing others who possess good interpersonal skills. Even hanging out can serve an important function in this regard. However, none of these practices can replace dating. The process of dating provides the one-on-one setting

Dating serves multiple important purposes for emerging adults, including helping them build important social skills and practice the ability to commit that will help them better prepare themselves to be able to "marry the right person at the right time in the right place." Welden Andersen, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

with a member of the opposite sex that will best identify the skills and attributes (such as kindness, communication skills, selflessness) needed to succeed in a relationship, allow them to practice those skills, and help them learn to commit. In addition to these important functions served by dating, young people need to be dating because it provides the context in which they can, most importantly, find a spouse.

Spiritual Growth

Finally, emerging adults can follow the example of the Savior in preparing for their ministries by striving to grow spiritually (see Luke 2:52). They should use this time to strengthen their testimonies and their relationships with the Savior. They should make it a habit to study the scriptures, pray daily, attend their church meetings, pay full tithes, and, if possible, visit the temple. If developed early, these habits will carry over into their marriages and be a blessing to them throughout their lives.

Another essential part of spiritual development is service to others. This age should not be a time completely devoted to oneself. Individualism (that is, a focus solely on oneself) is a major theme in most Western societies today. This is especially so for many 18- to 27-year-olds who often feel it is a time to enjoy life before they have to settle down to the responsibilities that come with a family and career (Ravert, 2009). Hence, they tend to do whatever pleases them. Indeed, narcissism (or selfishness) is seen to be particularly high among today's emerging adults (Twenge, 2006).

Our young people cannot fall into that trap. I once learned a powerful lesson about passing up opportunities to serve. While climbing aboard a train in Romania in preparation for a three-hour train ride, I found myself without a seat and packed in the small entryway with numerous others in my unfortunate situation. While figuring out what to do for the long journey without a seat, I was approached by a small child begging for food and money. Romanian trains were at that time notorious for beggars going from compartment to compartment. I gave her a few pieces of candy, and

she continued on her way. In an attempt to find a place to get out of the crowd and sit for the long ride, I crawled into a small luggage compartment.

Later, while I was trying to find a comfortable position in my cramped space and was complaining to myself about my predicament, the small child returned. I am sure she had canvassed the entire train and returned to me because she perceived that I had more to give. She seated herself in front of me and proceeded to plead with me for more. I was so full of self-pity and was so focused on my own predicament (which was not really that bad) that I was more concerned about my own comfort than this small girl's needs. I thought that if I gave her food or money, I would soon be surrounded by other beggars, and, with nowhere to hide, I would be "bothered" for the rest of my ride. Therefore, I decided to wait until my stop and *then* I would give her some food, money, clothing, and a blanket that I had for just such an occasion. However, a few stops before my own, the train came to a halt and there was a rush of people towards the exit. When the din settled, I saw that the girl was no longer there. She had given up waiting on me. She had left the train and returned to the extreme cold of that Romanian winter day without the food, clothing, and money that she so desperately needed and that I so selfishly had kept because I did not want to be bothered. I was so concerned about myself that I missed the opportunity to give to somebody in need. I pictured her small, coatless, hungry body out in the cold and will never forget how terrible I felt. The words of the Savior concerning those who are hungry, thirsty, and naked echoed in my head, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

Just as I was focused solely on myself in this situation, this time of emerging adulthood, when young people have so few responsibilities to and for others (for example, spouse, employer, children), can lead some young people to focus almost exclusively on themselves. Our young people should not be so focused on their own comfort during emerging adulthood that they pass up opportunities to serve. They need to accept callings and magnify them, be faithful visiting teachers and home teachers, and share their time and talents with others. Because of the growth that sacrifice brings, I

Emerging adults can follow the example of the Savior in preparing for their ministries by striving to grow spiritually (see Luke 2:52). They should use this time to strengthen their testimonies and their relationships with the Savior. Matt Reier, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

encourage young people to consider tithing their time in addition to their income. In other words, I challenge young people to give a "tithe" of their time (not literally 10% of one's day but whatever amount weekly or monthly that would reflect a true sacrifice in the service of others) in volunteering to work with children, the homeless, the elderly, or even their roommates, family, and friends. Regardless of how or where the service is given, young people will enjoy the spiritual growth that comes through caring for our Heavenly Father's children, and doing this will prepare them for a life of service to spouse and children.

Prepared For Your Ministry

In emulating the Savior in each of these areas, young people can follow the Lord's example and use this time to improve themselves physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. These improvements will not only bless their own lives but it will prepare them for their "ministry" as a spouse and parent. Because of the significance of marriage, I have directed my words mainly towards preparing for one's ministry as spouse (i.e., preparation for marriage). However, there is certainly a much broader application to this principle. Indeed, in growing in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and men (see Luke 2:52), the Lord prepared himself for his mortal ministry. Young people, too, can prepare for their own ministries here in mortality, which may include being a spouse and parent, serving in callings in the Church, pursuing and maintaining careers, and providing community service. Again, while the most important ministries one will ever serve in will be as a wife and mother or as a husband and father, they are not the only ministries young people may find themselves in throughout their lives. Attempting to "become the right person" in the areas outlined previously will certainly prepare individuals for a family ministry, but improvement in these areas will likewise help them become prepared for other ministries along the way. The same skills of seeking an education, taking care of one's body, improving one's social skills, and growing spiritually

During emerging adulthood, young men have many opportunities to serve and grow in the form of missions, priesthood responsibilities and quorums, and temple ordinances. Matt Reier, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

will prepare one for success in the workplace, service in the Church, and being a contributing member of the community.

A Word to Young Men

Latter-day Saint young men have a great deal of structure provided for them during emerging adulthood. They have many opportunities to serve and grow in the form of missions, priesthood responsibilities and quorums, and temple ordinances. One challenge facing our young men today is the tendency to avoid utilizing this structure to their advantage. Instead, a focus on pleasurable leisure pursuits fills up too much time during the average day

of many young men. In a recent study of non–Latter-day Saint emerging adults (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2012), my colleague and I attempted to examine the characteristics of emerging adults who are flourishing and who are floundering. We identified three types of young people—one group that was flourishing and two types who were floundering. The criteria that distinguished the first floundering group (we labeled this group the "externalizing group") were high levels of alcohol, drug, pornography, and video game use, as well as a high number of sexual partners. It was not engaging in just one of these behaviors that marked them as floundering but rather a pattern of behavior that included high activity of all of these behaviors. In other words, they were focused on selfish, hedonistic, and leisurely behaviors.

What is so noticeable about this finding is that men made up 83% of this floundering group. Furthermore, men made up 77% of the other floundering group as well. This second group (labeled "poorly-adjusted group") consisted of individuals who, like the externalizing group, scored high on alcohol and drug use and number of sexual partners, but they also all scored high on depression and anxiety and low on self-esteem. Combined, of all of the men in the sample, 70% of them fell into one of the two floundering groups. Only 30% fell into the flourishing group (the group identified by their strong, internalized values related to kindness, honesty, and fairness, as well as low levels of anxiety and depression, low levels of alcohol, drug, video game, and pornography use, low numbers of sexual partners, and often, increased religiosity and self-esteem). In comparison, 80% of the college-age women in our study were classified as flourishing.

Although this study focused on non–Latter-day Saint emerging adults, the concern is that it might reflect all too well what might be occurring among some Latter-day Saint males as well. In our own samples of Latter-day Saint emerging adults, the amount of time spent playing video games is alarmingly high for a certain portion of young men. Specifically, 27% of young men report playing video games several days a week while 5% report playing daily and totaling anywhere from 10 to 24 hours a week (Nelson, 2012). Likewise, there are a number of Latter-day Saint young men who view pornography,

with 35% reporting that they have viewed pornography during the past year (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, & Carroll, 2010). Although participation in hedonistic behaviors such as pornography is certainly wrong, it is not necessarily problematic to participate in some other forms of leisure activities (such as video games); it is the amount of time spent engaged in these activities that poses a threat to young men. It is this concern that Elder Ian S. Ardern (2011), a member of the Seventy, addressed in general conference: "I know our greatest happiness comes as we tune in to the Lord and to those things which bring a lasting reward, rather than mindlessly tuning in to countless hours of status updates, Internet farming, and catapulting angry birds at concrete walls. I urge each of us to take those things which rob us of precious time and determine to be their master, rather than allowing them through their addictive nature to be the master of us" (p. 32). Again, it is not the participation in some of these behaviors that is the problem. It is the amount of time that many young men spend engaged in leisure activities that is problematic. Obviously, behaviors that break the Word of Wisdom or the law of chastity need to be avoided at all costs, but engaging in other recreational pursuits that detract from preparation for adult roles should be done in moderation. Young men need to be cautious and use their time in a way that will fully prepare them for their ministry as husband, father, provider, and protector.

A Word to Young Women

In writing a few words directed specifically to young women, I would like to share the profound experience I had while writing this section of the chapter. I had finished writing what I thought would be the final version of this chapter (including the following paragraph) but felt that I ought to wait before submitting it to the editors of the book. Please read what I had written at that time and then I will continue with the experience.

Although there are similar issues faced by both men and women during emerging adulthood, there are some challenges that tend

to be more gender specific. For young women, impediments to a successful transition to adulthood and preparation for marriage come in the form of lack of structure. Men have numerous developmental opportunities provided for them throughout adolescence (for instance, the duties and responsibilities of the Aaronic Priesthood) and into emerging adulthood. These opportunities for growth include missions at the beginning of emerging adulthood, the responsibilities and duties that come with receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood, and temple ordinances. For women, most of these growth-promoting forms of structure do not occur until marriage or age 21 (at which time they might choose to serve a mission). As a result, it is necessary that young women create opportunities for growth rather than succumbing to idleness during this period of their lives.

As I stated previously, I decided to wait before submitting to the editors of this book the version of this chapter that included the previous paragraph. It was just a few days later that President Thomas S. Monson declared the historic change in the age at which young women can serve missions. As a teacher of classes comprising mainly young women and as one whose research focuses on this period of life (and now as a father of a nineteen-year-old daughter), I have been so concerned about the young women of the Church for a very long time. Therefore, I cried tears of joy as I listened to a prophet of God make an announcement that blesses the lives of Latter-day Saint young women. It came as a further witness to me that he is a prophet of the Lord who receives revelation for our time. Given the challenges facing emerging adults in today's society in general, and Latter-day Saint young women in particular, it was an incredible experience to behold a prophet make a change that directly addresses what many young women today need at this time in their lives.

Because serving a mission is a priesthood responsibility for young men and an opportunity for young women, it is important to note that a mission

During emerging adulthood, it is necessary for young women to create opportunitites for growth—actively preparing themselves for whatever ministry they will enter rather than succumbing to idleness. Matt Reier, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

will not be right for all young women. Therefore, I still think it is important to reiterate that it is necessary for young women to create opportunities for growth (whether that be a mission, education, service experience, and so on) rather than succumbing to idleness. It is important that young women are actively engaged in the process of preparing themselves for *whatever* ministry they will enter. Too many young women have been letting valuable time for preparation lapse as they have passively waited for their ministry of wife and

mother to begin. Elder Dallin H. Oaks (2006) directed the following to young single women, "If you are just marking time waiting for a marriage prospect, stop waiting. You may never have the opportunity for a suitable marriage in this life, so stop waiting and start moving. Prepare yourself for life—even a single life—by education, experience, and planning" (p. 14). By following this wise counsel, young women can prepare themselves (that is, in knowledge, physically, socially, and spiritually) for a lifetime of service, whether it be in a family, a career, their wards and stakes, or their communities. By ignoring this counsel and focusing too narrowly on a ministry (for instance, marriage) that might not come as soon as some might desire, they may, while just waiting, miss out on growth-promoting opportunities (such as education, missions, service opportunities, career training), and thereby may find themselves not only unprepared for marriage but unqualified for whatever ministry in which they may find themselves. A broad view of preparing for one's ministry will help young women be better prepared for whatever they will do, including, but not exclusive to, life as wife and mother.

Conclusion

I mentioned previously that my research has focused on identifying the characteristics of young people who flourish in emerging adulthood. We found that the criteria that distinguished those who were flourishing were that they tended to have a positive sense of self-worth; less alcohol and drug use; low levels of pornography and video game use; strong internalized values related to kindness, honesty, and fairness; and, for many, greater religiosity. Again, this was not a Latter-day Saint sample and yet the results reflect characteristics, behaviors, and relationships that capture the type of life that Latter-day Saint emerging adults need to be striving for in their efforts to prepare for marriage and other ministries. The characteristics of happy, flourishing young people include adhering to commandments such as the Word of Wisdom and law of chastity, using their time well, developing traits that will lead to stronger relationships with others (for example, kindness, honesty), and engaging

in spiritually strengthening activities (such as prayer, worship, service). As emerging adults follow the example of the Savior in preparing their minds, bodies, social skills, and spirits for their future ministries, they will, in the process, become the right person and, indeed, be better prepared for marriage.

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