

I have been asked to speak to you in honor of Stanford Larsen because, among other reasons, I was his Scoutmaster when he first came into Boy Scouts and, more recently, as his quorum president when he received the Melchizedek Priesthood and was ordained an Elder. He had also honored me by asking me to serve as his mentor as he worked on his Eagle project – just before all of this started.

The family sat down the other night to discuss their memories of Stanford, and very graciously invited me to listen in. As I talk about Stan, please note that he, of all people, would not want this to be a sad occasion, so if you feel like smiling or chuckling – go ahead. If you note the family smiling and don't understand why, it's because I'm not giving you all the details of what happened – but they know and are remembering them.

The course Stanford would follow was charted beginning at the birth of his brother Bradford – the family was living in Utah at the time and, though they wanted to name a child Stanford, there was already a family member by that name living in the area, so they couldn't. However, when Stanford was born they were 2500 miles away and no one could tell them no, and so Stanford got his name. Apparently it came with a legacy, as my understanding is that his uncle got into a lot of the same situations when he was young that Stanford would find himself in as he grew up.

Stanford has been described as “An extrovert in a family of introverts” – and there is a great deal of evidence to support that, including his style of dress (mainly at school). I am something of a conservative dresser, but wore this tie in honor of Stan. Stan always wanted to be out and about, getting to know everything and everyone he could find or see. As a young child, he felt a call to venture out into the world to see what there was to see – so he had to be restrained. He later referred to this by saying “my mom tied me to a tree.” This, of course, led to his older siblings taking advantage of the situation from time to time. At the age of three, while visiting his grandparents in Utah, he worked his way along the wrong side of the railing to the basement stairs so that he ended up on standing about a full story above the basement floor. His grandparents, somewhat shocked (though they probably shouldn't have been, considering his name) commented that, in all the years they'd lived there no one had ever done that. When John left the house, he had to be careful to not let Stanford see how he opened the storm door (Stanford had already figured out how to open all the other doors), because otherwise Stan would have been out exploring again.

As part of the “learning by doing” process Stan followed throughout his life, his family had to endure some inconveniences – like having to store the knobs to the stove out of his reach (or at least somewhere he didn't know about), having to deal with people who would come and tell them “Did you know that your son is on the roof?” or stepping outside of church to find him sitting on top of the light pole (the one outside the doors at the back of the building to my right, though the light has changed). Then he and another young man, at the age of 15 or 16, discovered that they were tall enough (and strong enough) to put their hands on one wall, their feet on the other, and climb up until they were horizontal across the hallway just above the vision range of the normal

person. Then they would announce their presence just as someone would walk underneath...

This was an improvement over the time when he was young and would hide in the Primary closet. At first his parents thought there was something about Primary he didn't like – but it turned out he just knew that the Primary Presidency kept a jar of candy in the closet and so would avail himself of the opportunity. It's not like he was trying hard to hide; he was just small enough that the taller people (like adults) didn't see him – including one special adult who also knew about the candy jar, and would stop by to check on the quality of the candy from time to time (no, I'm not going to tell you who it was).

Stanford's interest in trying new things also resulted in a few mishaps. Thinking back to my first campout as the Scoutmaster, which also happened to be Stan's first campout with the troop, I was kind of showing off for one of the other scouts by toasting a pop-tart over an open fire. I want you to know that I was prepared (well, prepared enough so I knew I would be fine anyway) for this – I had brought some gloves from my days as a firefighter; heavy leather with a thick wool liner. So I just held the pop-tart over the fire until it was warm and handed it back to the scout. I had not yet learned that important lesson about the scouts watching and emulating their Scoutmaster – nor did I notice (until it was already too late) that he was copying me. Except that he was wearing his older brother's nylon and gortex gloves. In case you didn't know, nylon and gortex don't react well with fire. After that campout I gave out awards (just to try to get the scouts to come back). I needn't have worried about Stanford – he loved campouts (though not necessarily the advancement work, but that's another story). I don't remember the name of the award I gave to Stanford, but on the next campout he got it again – this time for slipping while putting my hatchet away (yes, I had warned the scouts that it was sharp) and cutting his thumb. Then there was the incident with the plumbing merit badge and soldering pipe... after that, the award officially became the "Manly Stanley" Award. Being the overachiever that he was, Stan practiced at home so he could continue to earn the award. For example, there was the time when he was lighting fires in the driveway – piles of leaves, on a windy day. He started early – at the age of about 7-8 (just before Cub Scouts), he managed to jab himself rather painfully about ten minutes before church (thus showing an aptitude for time management as well) which required his parents to find rides for the rest of the children so they could take him to the emergency room. With respect to the Manly Stanley award, I understand that it may have been retired already – if not, I now announce that it is officially retired in his honor.

Stan was a natural leader, as many extroverts are (probably because the rest of us are too scared to put ourselves on public display). At an LDS Camporee, he volunteered to be the Patrol Leader for a group of slightly younger scouts and soon had them following him around the course and going through all the stations as a group – and that's not easy, I assure you. At one church dance he organized everyone and got them together dancing the "Bottle dance" from "Fiddler on the Roof".

He could do the dance because he was exceptionally limber and flexible – my understanding is that he can limbo better than any of the other youth in the stake; he got below the bar at about two feet. He could juggle – anything (given his experience with the hatchet, I hope he didn't try sharp objects, at least not too often).

He loved to dance – especially once he discovered girls, which happened around age 13. He asked his mom “Why are girls so pretty?” Thinking that he had someone specific in mind, she replied “Which one?” His response? “All of them.” He would go to dances (wearing a Sponge Bob Square Pants tie that said “Chicks dig me”) and dance every dance, usually (as far as I know) with different young women. His family tells me that all the young women were his friends, and I believe it. When I went to see him in the hospital, he was always surrounded by a group of young women. His birthday party when he was in the sixth grade was more than half girls.

Stan had a huge amount of talent – and he developed it well. He performed in numerous stage presentations (kind of what you'd expect from someone as outgoing as Stan). He played the piano and the saxophone – in fact, one of his major disappointments about being ill was that he could no longer play the saxophone. Not that he let anyone know his disappointments.

Stanford was a people-person, which is why there are so many of you here today. He started early – at 18 months, he was so interested in other people that, while at church on his father's shoulder while someone came by he said “What's your name?” Somewhat surprised, the young man told him he was Michael. The next week, the same young man was walking by and Stanford called out “Hi, Michael!” He continued this practice (not staying on his father's shoulder, getting to know people) as he went through life. One year (Stan would have been in 9th or 10th grade) during the Holiday Stroll in Nashua, his family had to stop every ten feet or so to say “Hi!” to someone Stan knew – hundreds, if not more, of people. They were at Barnes and Noble one evening for a Family Home Evening of Books and Treats – and got 50% off the treats because “Stan was awesome.”

Stan was not just a people-person with girls or with people his own age, or with those who were popular. Stan was a people person with everyone, everywhere, all the time. When he was in Play Pals (he was really little), there were 15 handicapped children and 5 non-handicapped children. Stan was always talking about his friends – but his mom couldn't tell from what he said whether he was talking about someone who was handicapped or someone who was not. When he helped at the Special Olympics, he reached out to everyone there, working to make their time more enjoyable and help them have a good time. While he was at Dartmouth-Hitchcock, they were having a “Make-a-crown” day for the younger cancer patients. Even though he was a little older, he joined right in. He immediately befriended a little girl (about five years old) who had thin, wispy hair as a result of going through chemo. He was able to develop enough rapport with her that she felt comfortable asking him questions about one of her fears – “Do other kids make fun of you because you're bald?” He was able to reassure her and lay her fears to rest. While helping in the nursery at a Relief Society activity, he spent an hour playing Barbie with a little girl, who absolutely adored him for it. You see,

Stanford had learned, at a young age, how to look at the inside of a person and ignore the outside. Most children do this naturally – and almost all of them outgrow it fairly quickly. Stanford just never did. He looked at people the way Jesus did – seeing what they had the potential to be instead of what they had, as yet, become.

How did he manage to do this? Because in all he did, Stanford lived the gospel of Jesus Christ. He always said a blessing on his food, even in the school cafeteria. With all the noise, he would stick his fingers in his ears – and pray anyway. For awhile the other students made fun of him, but he persisted and learned that enduring actually works – because his friends (and he had a lot of them) stood up for him.

We all know that taking the name of the Lord in vain is not appropriate behavior, but most (not all, but most) of us tend to simply walk away from situations where such behavior takes place. Not Stanford – he would tell the person (or people) that he did not approve of or appreciate their behavior.

But he didn't just tell people when they were doing things wrong – he also took advantage of opportunities to praise people, or to take a moment to help someone when he noticed that they were in trouble. As I understand it, there was another student in his seminary class who was having some issues, to the point where, when the other student really lost it and had to leave class, Stan went out and talked them through it. But that wasn't enough for Stan – he didn't only work with them that day, but for some time after that as well.

As I'm sure anyone who knows Stanford is aware, young men who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints are expected to serve a two year mission at age 19. The idea of having a steady girlfriend before that mission is actively discouraged. Well, Stan found a young lady he really liked, and things developed until he realized that he had a steady girlfriend. Once they broke up, he promised that he would not have a steady girlfriend until after his mission. Despite the fact that he got along very well with the young ladies (and they with him), he kept that promise. Stan kept his word.

Stan set the example in a lot of other ways too. I'm not sure exactly when it started, but Stan would regularly get up in Church during Fast and Testimony meeting and share his very strong testimony of the gospel with the ward. For those of you who may be unfamiliar with the terminology, as a Church we fast for two meals, normally on the first Sunday of each month, and donate what we would have spent for food to benefit those in need. The first Sunday meeting is called Fast and Testimony meeting, because rather than have scheduled speakers, members of the ward are invited to share their testimony of Jesus Christ and His restored gospel on the earth. In sharing our testimonies with others, not only are their testimonies strengthened, but ours are as well. Stan's was very, very strong – to the point where, listening to him, you felt like you could almost see into the next life.

Stan's faith was also strong and solidly anchored on the rock that is Jesus the Christ. He relied on the Lord. Most of us talk about doing it; he actually did it. For

those who are questioning why someone so good had to die, perhaps even wondering how a merciful God can allow such a thing, I would like to share with you the idea that, as Stan knew and demonstrated in his daily life (especially over the last few months), this life is not the end. Success in this life is not measured by a long life, nor by how much money you make. Everyone here has had classes that ended with a test. Everyone here has wished that they understood what the teacher was looking for. The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that this life is a test, and it teaches us the nature of the test. The test is to show through our actions that we have faith in God and His Son, Jesus Christ. As Jesus taught in the New Testament, the rains descend, the floods come, and the winds blow on both the wise and the foolish – but if our lives are founded on the Rock of our Salvation, who is Jesus Christ, they will not fall¹. Stanford's life did not fall.

But how is it that so many prayers on Stan's behalf could go unanswered? Quoting from a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, "I recognize that, on occasion, some of our most fervent prayers may seem to go unanswered. We wonder, "Why?" I know that feeling! I know the fears and tears of such moments. But I also know that our prayers are never ignored. Our faith is never unappreciated. I know that an all-wise Heavenly Father's perspective is much broader than is ours. While we know of our mortal problems and pain, He knows of our immortal progress and potential."²

In fact, Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve said in a talk he gave in one of our General Conferences – "So many things beat upon us in a lifetime that simply enduring may seem almost beyond us. That's what the words in the scripture "Ye must . . . endure to the end" seemed to mean to me when I first read them. It sounded grim, like sitting still and holding on to the arms of the chair while someone pulled out my tooth... But the test a loving God has set before us is not to see if we can endure difficulty. It is to see if we can endure it well. We pass the test by showing that we remembered Him and the commandments He gave us. And to endure well is to keep those commandments whatever the opposition, whatever the temptation, and whatever the tumult around us. We have that clear understanding because the restored gospel makes the plan of happiness so plain."³ If anyone endured well, it was Stanford. Simply being diagnosed with cancer would be enough to dishearten most 17 year olds; to add insult to injury, he had to stay in the Pediatric ward of the hospital in a bed that is shorter than he was. I won't bore you with the many other trials anyone with cancer experiences (other than the hair that often made him appear to have a halo), but he withstood them well. His parents, siblings, and many who knew him were having a tougher time than he seemed to be having. And lest anyone think that he simply didn't know what was going on, he told his father at one point that "he [had] to have a good attitude because if he [didn't] have a good attitude then he would give up and then he would die."⁴ Stan knew what he was facing and continued on with faith in God, "willing to submit to all things which the Lord [saw] fit to inflict upon him."⁵ By so doing, he showed his faith that our Heavenly Father really does know best, no matter how it may appear to us at the time.

And so if anyone is looking for an example of faith in adversity, of trust in the Lord, remember Stanford. Remember that no matter how short his life may have been,

it was a success – because he endured well. He trusted that God knew best and that whatever he might be required to endure would benefit him eternally, unpleasant as it might be at this particular point in time; and so he accepted the will of God in all things, and showed his willingness to submit by his attitude every day, no matter what the most recent news from the doctor or the scans may have been. His attitude made life possible for the rest of us who could not stand even the idea of what might be coming. And so I am sure, both because of my understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and because of the feelings I had while praying on his behalf the night he passed through the veil to the next life, that he was greeted with open arms and that, while he may not have filled a mission in this life, he will certainly fill one in the next – “I beheld that the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance and redemption, through the sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God, among those who are in darkness and under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead. The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God, And after they have paid the penalty of their transgressions, and are washed clean, shall receive a reward according to their works, for they are heirs of salvation.”⁶ It is to that labor that Stanford has been called – to a mission that will last until the second coming of the Savior and beyond.

I close with these words from the Savior to Peter, said about John the beloved and the work John was to perform here on earth. Apply them to Stanford, but in a different setting: “And for this cause the Lord said unto Peter: ... he (John) desired of me that he might bring souls unto me ... my beloved has desired that he might do more, or a greater work ... than what he has before done. Yea, he has undertaken a greater work; therefore I will make him as flaming fire and a ministering angel; he shall minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation.”⁷

¹ Matthew 7:25-27

² “Jesus Christ – the Master Healer,” Elder Russell M. Nelson, Conference report, October 2005

³ “In the Strength of the Lord,” Elder Henry B. Eyring, Conference report, May 2004

⁴ e-mail received 29 Dec 2006

⁵ Mosiah 3:19

⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 138:57-59

⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 7:4-6