

The Jumpmaster (Inspiration)

Vance Theodore

Introduction: Sermon for Graduate Students—MA Chaplaincy Program

I believe I will begin my sermon by taking all of us a journey in a C 17 Load Master. It is a large plane, but don't worry it will hold all of us. We all will get ready to jump out of a perfectly good airplane. The jumpmaster will be the Lord and we will be loaded up with our combat equipment ready to exit from the plane. The Lord will ask us to hook-up our static line to a steel cable that will deploy our parachutes. He will then ask us to make sure that our equipment is secure. We will make all the appropriate checks and then tap each other on the shoulder with Jeremy giving the Lord the sign that everything is okay. We will then wait for the doors to open on the C 17 Loadmaster.

We have all prepared for this jump. We all will jump. Many of us will be nervous as we stand waiting to exit from the door. However, as we wait for the light to turn green, the assistant jumpmaster (Christ) leans out the door and checks for wind. Giving the Lord the thumbs up sign, he motions for us to go (exit the plane). Out we all go putting our knees to the breeze. Jeremy first and then his fellow cohorts, Anthony, Delbert, Christian followed by Eric and Tyson.¹ Last to go of course is the Chaplain. He's the older gentlemen in the group and needs more time to shuffle out the door.

¹ These are graduate students in the MA Chaplaincy Program, Brigham Young University. The purpose of this sermon was to give the students an example of my style of preparing a message, talk or sermon.

The static lines are handed to the Jumpmaster, with one last look as we quickly exit the door counting to 4 before the chute open.

As we check our canopy for holes. We all look to the right and to the left to see if any jumpers are taking our air. If they are too close we yell slip away.

For many of us, this trip began in August. We joined program, and believed that this would be a grand experience. With our professors and cohort members in place, we began our journey here at BYU, some of you were recent graduates from others program, a few were military veterans, and one had no experience with the military. You are bright, and hard working. Actually, you are awesome.

Nevertheless, when you came here some had to readjust. You may have felt that you no longer belonged (pause) or that you were not the moral compass anymore for others. It seems that everyone here at BYU has a moral compass. For many the load was great and the work was challenging. For others it was light. Perhaps, the work was not hard but too much--too much to do in so little time. Some felt that they were only checking a box, others were excited to finally be done and begin their own journey in the chaplaincy.

However, as faithful latter-day saints each Sunday you partook of the sacrament and received guidance from your leaders, and you were edified and nourished by the good word of God. You all have endured your classes, and the

demands of professors, some participated in swimming, other in guitar classes. You all have families and juggle tremendous responsibilities. Some have been sick; some have overcome personal challenges. All have been challenged in their own ways.

Nevertheless, back to the plane. The plane represents our journey here at BYU. You are the cohort who daily comes together to be nourished by the good word of your professors, scriptures, lessons, and fellowshiped by each other. The jumpmaster represents the Lord. He asks us to stand up. This means that he wants us to not shirk our duties. He also wants us to lift where we stand as President Dieter F. Uchtdorf suggested.² He asks you the cohort to hook up³—this means to communicate with him on a daily basis. Pray, to not forget the Lord in all our doings. And we have promised to love him with all our might, with all our mind and with all our strength. (Deuteronomy 6:5 KJV) We promise to remember His words and trust the Lord with all our heart; and lean not unto our own understanding; and to counsel with the Lord in all that we do. (Proverbs 3:5-6; Alma 37:37)

² Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Lift Where You Stand,” *Ensign*, October, 2008.

³ These are jump commands that paratroops receive from the jumpmaster before exiting an airplane like a C-130 at 1200 feet.

We doubt our doubts and not our faith.⁴ He knows that many of us are laden with a heavy load. He is there for us. Nevertheless he has commanded us to comfort those who stand in need of comfort, (Mosiah 18:9) and to lift those who are poor, and to be involved in selfless service. As we hook up our static lines to his line which represent the good word, delivered through scripture, general conference talks, the counsel from our Bishops and goodly parents, teachers, and friends. He then asks us to check our equipment. He doesn't want us to have an equipment malfunction. He doesn't want us to be depressed, sad, or lonely. If we are, He encourages us to come to Him. "Come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28-29). His Father asks us to remember Him in all that we do. He knows about the plan, because He sent his only begotten Son that through Him and by Him we might be saved and exalted. He wants us to work together.

As we check our equipment, we tap each other on the shoulder signifying that all is okay. We do this by looking out for one another whether it is through taking notes or preparing google presentations, being kind to one another, putting other's need in front of our own. As we go down the line tapping each other on the shoulder, Jeremy gives the Jumpmaster (Heavenly Father) the signal and says: All Okay Jumpmaster. The Lord is the one who cares for the unit because he wants

⁴ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," *Ensign*, October, 2013.

you all to return safely home. As the Jumpmaster standing at the door kindly looks at all of you, he asks that His assistant jumpmaster to check and lean out the door to see if there is a clear space for all to land. The assistant jumpmaster is loved by the Jumpmaster. He has prepared the way. He gave His life so that we could all return to our Heavenly Father if we but obey His commands. He has descended below all things so that we could ascend and overcome all earthly challenges if we but believe in Him. He knows that our load, at times, is heavy. He understands that we all struggle. All He wants from all of us is that we put all our cares at the foot of the cross, every day, if needs be. Then, perhaps we can exit the door knowing that the cross is always there for us.

We are ready and then the Jump master says Go! We all hand him our static lines and with our combat loads we jump with faith knowing that the landings at times can be hard. Some of us are scared, others are nervous, and some are determined that Come What May, We will Love it, as eloquently expressed by Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin in General Conference.⁵

Our chutes open, however, it is a jump at night and we can't see clearly. As we are in the air we wonder, questions come to our mind. How do I know if the jump commands will safely guide me home? How do we know what is right? Can

⁵ Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Come What May, and Love It," *Ensign*, October 2008.

we really trust the Jumpmaster? There are so many questions: Will I be accessioned into the chaplaincy right away after graduation? What is the right time to pursue my career? Is God there for me? How does one really know? Is my voice the inspiration, or a figment of my imagination? Can the Holy Spirit truly provide guidance? Is this really the true Church? Surely God loves all his children, there just can't be one way. With all these doubts swirling in your mind, and the jump zone not clearly defined there isn't enough light to see it. How do we discern the light? Did it come from me or did it come from God?

Elder David A. Bednar says that we all have the Holy Ghost which invites inspiration from Heavenly Father. Sometimes, messages come like a light switch when turned on. Elder Bednar believes this is usually not common. More commonly inspiration comes like sunlight lighting up the horizon which slowly lights the world. More often than not, for Elder Bednar, receiving inspiration is like a foggy day, in which you can take just a few steps into the cloudiness in which there is just enough light so that you can press forward.⁶

As we follow His teaching, and his example and live according to His commandments then we can receive His light and His light will help us to make

⁶ Elder David A. Bednar, "Patterns of Light-3 Parts," accessed March 25, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkOVbT2oxnI>.

those difficult decisions. Personally, I believe that this light can safely guide us home if we but out trust in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The semester is coming to an end. Some have and others will from this cohort join the military, all are preparing for the end of the term. And perhaps, some of you may miss each other.

Back to the analogy, you are still in the air and there is a jumper taking your air, you panic, you are leap frogging with another jumper towards the ground certain that you both will fall into tragedy. You are hoping and praying that someone will save you. Suddenly, the jumpers from your cohort on your left and right yell to the individual taking your air to slip away. The individual slips away, and you thank God for His tender mercies and blessings promising Him you will not forget Him.

Now you are ready to land. You are about 100 feet above the ground. You can clearly see the drop zone. You release your combat load. It silently falls towards the drop zone. You realize that you have prepared for your classes, that you are ready though sad to end this experience and that this will be the last jump with this cohort. But through your life, you will have many jumps with many other units. Some of you will remember this cohort fondly. You say you will never forget your friends. However time will move on and you will join other units.

As you ponder about your cohort, you realize that perhaps there may be some from this unit who will leave, having lost their faith in the Jumpmaster. However, you also realize that He is always there, and He loves all his jumpers no matter what may come.

The years have gone by. You have had a successful career. You are growing old. You enter the plane for the last time, alone. You look around the inside of the plane. You notice that the Jump master is not there nor His assistant. No matter, you know the commands. You have participated in many jumps with many units. You now understand the joys, challenges and pains of life. You hook-up your static line for the last time. You slowly check your equipment. There are no shoulders to tap. You are alone. You are ready. You will go on this jump by yourself. The door opens. You can feel the air on your body and hear its roar. You wait for the light to turn green. The light turns green, and you put your knees to the breeze. Your chute opens and through your faith you know that you will safely land. Your landing is soft. You no longer are burdened by your combat equipment. As you rise you notice family, and friends helping you out of your jump harness. You put your chute in your kit bag and you walk off the drop zone with friends and family. You are happy and then you see the Jump master. You approach Him. You remember the commands and say All Okay Jump master. He encircles you with his loving arms.

He kisses you on your cheek, and whispers into your ear, “Well done my good and faithful servant.”

Fellow students, it is my testimony that He lives and that through Him and by His Grace, He can answer all our prayers if we but believe. And He can lead us **all** safely home.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.