

# *Meekness and Greatness*

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Dear brothers and sisters, as we meet at this intersection of a too hot but too short summer and the beginning of a new fall semester, it is my privilege to welcome you again to our annual university conference. Today, as you know, we honor some of the many who have contributed much and brought increased distinction to Brigham Young University. It is also my privilege to make an annual report on some of the happenings, progress, and challenges we have and will face at this university we love.

Our thanks go to all of you who are attending. Among the happy faces I see are those who support every activity and assembly whenever they can. Likewise, we express especial welcome to our retirees and guests who have moved on in some respects but have never forgotten or lessened their loyalty and support for BYU. To those of you who are with us for the first time, let me again tell you how pleased we are that you have joined us. We look forward to getting to know you better and to seeing the contributions you will make.

For those who have been on campus over the summer, you have endured noise, dust, and detours as we have moved along with several of the construction projects currently

under way. For those who have been away for a time, I suspect you have noticed a number of things that are different from when you were last here. The new Heritage housing buildings continue to be constructed, completed, and occupied. On the south side of campus the very large and impressive Life Sciences Building under construction continues to take shape, and we anticipate its completion in coming months. The addition to the Bean Museum is also on schedule and nearing completion. The utility tunnel project under way for several years with more to come is likewise on schedule.

Perhaps the most dramatic change for many is the first phase of a multiyear project to make our campus safer, more unified, more beautiful, and more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. While we already enjoy pleasing and delightful surroundings, we believe these modifications will help us be better positioned to serve our campus community even more in the future. Meanwhile, our construction has

---

*Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this address was given at the BYU annual university conference on 27 August 2013.*

been occurring at the same time as the major construction of the water pipeline for the Central Utah Project on 900 East. It has been difficult and occasionally frustrating to get to where you would like to be on campus. Since these are largely summer projects, we anticipate a little more quiet and order as the fall progresses.

Because so much of what is done with respect to physical facilities on this campus is funded by Church appropriations, we might forget that we also have the privilege of helping advance the work even faster by raising the money to improve or add new buildings or for other initiatives. Currently we are in the process of raising money to build a new engineering building to complement the facilities we already have in the Clyde and other buildings. We believe engineering is not only a discipline in which the general need is greater than ever before, but it is also an area in which BYU can excel and contribute at an even higher level in the future than is possible currently. Our board of trustees has enthusiasm for this project, and we are grateful to loyal and generous donors as well as for the important work being done by LDS Philanthropies to bring this vital dream to reality in the not-too-distant future.

In some ways unsettling but also exciting have been the dramatic changes occasioned by the announcement of President Thomas S. Monson last October about the lowering of missionary ages for both women and men. Understandably and wonderfully this has changed the planning and circumstances of literally thousands of our students and prospective students. As a result, the same is true for the university. For this reason I will comment on a number of these issues in more detail than I would otherwise. The immediate impact on BYU is considerable, and the effects—largely positive—will persist for years to come.

Thousands of young women, now eligible to serve at nineteen, have chosen to submit their applications and serve as soon as possible.

Thus we will have fewer second-year female students this fall semester than is typically the case for us. And with the eligible age for young men now at eighteen, we will also have fewer first-year men because a large number have chosen to serve directly after completing high school. For these reasons we have had a very small decrease in our student body size so far during 2013. We now anticipate that our student body will be lower by about 10 percent to 15 percent than is typical for fall semester.

A question frequently asked is why this slightly smaller student body needs to be? It is generally well known that with our very competitive admission standards, large numbers of students at other institutions would enroll in or transfer to BYU if given the opportunity. There are three basic reasons why we have not pursued this approach, even though we are aware that there are many who would like to come and could likely succeed at BYU if given the opportunity. Let me mention our considerations. Each reason could well justify our approach on its individual merits, and I present them without any particular priority or weighting. All are important.

First, our board of trustees has not increased our enrollment ceiling and seems unlikely to do so in the immediate future because of how very expensive an institution BYU is. While our numbers are down a little, we fully anticipate that those who have been studying here or those who have been admitted but have deferred enrolling until after missionary service will return to campus in large numbers starting in fall 2015. We will need to accommodate them and are preparing to do so.

Second, as I just mentioned, other colleges and universities with large numbers of Latter-day Saint students are also experiencing roughly the same phenomenon as we are, with large numbers of missionaries leaving soon. Since a significant number of remaining students might have come to BYU if given the choice, it is the concern not only of our leaders

but also of ourselves that we do not exacerbate the already severe challenges being experienced at other institutions by bringing more of their students here and away from them. The budgets of state and other schools are generally tuition driven at a much higher level than occurs at BYU because of the tremendous generosity of our sponsoring Church. In all that we do, we wish to be good colleagues and neighbors.

Third, the Missionary Training Center is, as you know, located immediately to the north of our campus on ground that is jointly owned by the Church and BYU. With the dramatic increase in the number of missionaries to be trained and prepared, the MTC has looked to us to assist where we can, and our excellent BYU people have done a great job in working well with our MTC colleagues. Thus we have loaned, on a temporary basis, some student housing for the missionaries, and we also participate in all of the service functions necessary for that large, complicated, and wonderful facility. Just one example is that their weekly devotional service has been held here in the Marriott Center during the summer.

Over the long term, further developments and adjustments will be announced when appropriate by the Missionary Department and the Church spokespersons. It is a very exciting time for everyone, and we are grateful to be part of it in the context of our university responsibilities and this opportunity to support the Church in such a grand undertaking.

Some have wondered—exclusive of these and other physical changes and developments—what the eventual impact on the university might be. Obviously, we don't have all the answers, but we have every reason to be positive and optimistic. Let me share just one observation that I am confident will increase the effectiveness and quality of what transpires here.

Historically, after a fairly relaxed senior year in high school, many of our first-year young men have come to BYU planning to serve

missions and looking for things to do until receiving the call to serve. It has been easy for them to defer important decisions about what major to pursue and also to delay being serious in their studies until returning from their missionary service. I believe most will agree with me that a mission contributes not only to the growth and vitality of the Church but also to the maturation and development of the missionary. Thus, in a couple of years, many of our entering students and those who will be returning will come with more highly developed study skills, increased self-discipline, and increased clarity about their life and academic goals. Our already impressive student body will become even more so with an earlier mission experience. And again, we must never overlook the great privilege accorded to us in helping advance the primary mission of the Church with respect to proclaiming the gospel to the world.

Like death and taxes, university accreditation continues to be on the front burner in many respects. Never has there been a time when accreditation, regulation, and reporting have been so pervasive and therefore so important to the well-being of the university. Given the unique aspects of our mission and values, it is extremely important that we do things of the highest quality generally and also make sure that they are well documented and understood. In all of this we are extremely fortunate to have Professor James D. Gordon III as our leader in Planning and Assessment. Let me share some of what we have posted on our website and also share with the Northwest Commission, our accrediting agency. This is what we have said about our assessment conclusions for the most recent reporting cycle:

*Brigham Young University engages in assessment to make determinations regarding quality, effectiveness, and the fulfillment of its mission.*

*Four core themes, The Aims of a BYU Education, reflect essential elements of The Mission of Brigham*

*Young University. "A BYU education should be (1) spiritually strengthening, (2) intellectually enlarging, and (3) character building, leading to (4) lifelong learning and service." Each core theme has specific objectives which come from the university mission statement or The Aims of a BYU Education. Each objective is measured by indicators.*

*Annually the President's Council determines whether the indicators collectively demonstrate the achievement of the core theme objectives. If all the core theme objectives are achieved, then the core theme is achieved. If all the core themes are achieved, then the university meets an acceptable threshold of mission fulfillment. ["University Conclusions Based on Assessment for 2011-12," PDF at [assess.byu.edu](http://assess.byu.edu)]*

Our assessment results show that the university is fulfilling its mission. We are making progress regarding the assessment of learning outcomes across campus. All academic departments need to close the loop annually. They need to assess the achievement of their learning outcomes and report their conclusions on the learning outcomes website. They also need to report their actions or plans regarding improvement.

When the Northwest Commission evaluation team visits campus in 2015, it will look at entries written by the departments on the learning outcomes website. It will also visit some departments and ask them about their assessment processes. It may ask them what improvements they have made to their programs based on assessment. Each department needs to be prepared to answer these questions.

A primary purpose of assessment is improvement. As we evaluate our students' performance and thoughtfully take steps to improve, we will serve our students better and we will strengthen the university.

Please visit the website. While we have much work to do, we also have very much to celebrate. My sincere thanks go to all who work so hard in this important and necessary work.

In our large and diverse university community, change is rather constant. This is true not only with buildings, physical facilities, and programs but also with people. Recently we have welcomed Jennifer Paustenbaugh as our new university librarian. She replaced Scott Duvall, who has been interim university librarian for the last several months and now returns to his post as associate university librarian. Over the summer Brent L. Top has replaced Terry B. Ball as dean of Religious Education, Mary Ann Prater has succeeded K. Richard Young as dean of the McKay School of Education, and Lee Perry follows Gary C. Cornia as dean of the Marriott School of Management. To those retiring, I express our profound thanks for splendid service and loyal leadership. To those new in important assignments, we express our confidence, congratulations, and appreciation for your willingness to serve. As is always the case at BYU, these jobs are bigger than any of us who occupy them for a season. We are grateful that so many come so well prepared to serve and to lead.

Increasingly, much is being said and done on the national and international scenes with respect to innovative and new approaches to education. I believe Academic Vice President Brent W. Webb and his associates will go into more detail with the faculty this afternoon, but I wish to thank so many in our community who are working hard to make BYU even stronger, better, and more relevant with respect to delivering education in the best ways possible.

We have completed one year of a pilot program that has been designed to make available for on-campus students some general education courses that can be completed entirely online without a traditional classroom experience for that specific course. These have been coordinated with the campus calendar and have been generally well received by students and faculty alike. We will continue with their development and improvement during this coming

academic year. A major advantage of this approach is that it helps alleviate the traditional bottlenecks and scheduling problems that our students often encounter, which in turn lead to delays in completion and graduation. I want to thank the faculty and administrators who are working so vigorously on this initiative. While some of the delivery is different, we cannot and will not compromise on the quality of our offerings or the sanctity of our values, so this has not been a small undertaking.

In a similar vein, we continue to see impressive progress in blended classrooms that use a variety of pedagogies, including online experiences as well as “flipped” classrooms that focus on implementing and applying new knowledge gained largely outside of the classroom. Questions are then answered when students gather with the faculty, rather than having classroom time used to dispense information. Some of our excellent course materials are being used elsewhere, and we continue to think about and carefully explore ways that MOOCs, or massive open online courses, might become a more significant part of what we do. Our efforts, just to be clear, are not so much in wanting to be fashionable or to be in the midst of current fads but in doing all we can to make sure that a BYU education is the best model it can be for fulfilling our long-stated and approved Mission and Aims for as many students as possible.

In athletics we have had an impressive and very successful past year. The women’s soccer team capped a remarkable twenty-win season, with four victories in the NCAA tournament and an appearance in the Elite Eight, where they lost in double overtime to eventual national champion North Carolina. The team enjoyed tremendous support from the student body and community, posting the highest total attendance in the nation for the second year in a row.

The women’s volleyball team also enjoyed outstanding success, winning the West Coast Conference championship and making it to the

Round of Sixteen in the NCAA Tournament. Their twenty-eight wins were the team’s most since 1999. Meanwhile, the men’s volleyball team was ranked number one in the nation for most of the season and made their fifth appearance in the Final Four and National Championship games.

The football team won a school-record, fourth-consecutive bowl game, topping San Diego State in the Poinsettia Bowl. Ziggy Ansah was selected as the fifth player in the NFL draft, the highest pick for any defensive player in BYU history. That same day Ziggy celebrated the completion of his bachelor’s degree in actuarial science.

The men’s and women’s basketball teams both excelled in postseason play. The women reached the quarterfinals and the men reached the semifinals of the NIT tournaments.

Other teams and individual athletes had outstanding seasons—so much so that the Cougars won the West Coast Conference Commissioner’s Cup for overall team success. BYU also won both the Men’s All-Sports Trophy and the Women’s All-Sports Trophy, becoming the first WCC institution since 2008 to win all three awards in the same year.

BYU Broadcasting continues in its growth, prominence, and sharing of its message “See the Good in the World.” BYU Broadcasting won eleven Emmy awards this past year, exceeding the combined total number of Emmys it has won in all prior years. The awards were for programming on both BYUtv and BYUtv International. The Catholic Academy of Communication Professionals awarded BYUtv’s feature film *Silent Night* its prestigious Gabriel Award for Best Television Entertainment Program of the Year.

BYUtv launched a number of successful shows, including *Studio C*, the sketch comedy show starring BYU graduates, and *Granite Flats*, the channel’s first scripted series, which was watched by 1.75 million television viewers

and more than 60,000 online viewers in its first week.

In addition, BYUtv aired more than 100 live BYU sporting events nationwide and, to the delight of our WCC companion universities, seven non-BYU games from the WCC men's and women's basketball tournaments. They accomplished all of this with a small but exceptional professional staff and with the help of over three hundred student employees who play a role in almost every aspect of the operation.

As I believe everyone is aware, the work, accomplishments, and activities of Brigham Young University are becoming more widely recognized and appreciated than ever before. In the past year national media outlets have carried a variety of our stories and reports about faculty research and innovative student projects. Let me just mention a few examples by way of headlines without all the supportive information you can access later if you wish.

*"BYU Study Says Exercise May Reduce Motivation for Food":* This research was referenced in the *Wall Street Journal*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Glamour Magazine*, and *Health Magazine*.

*"Tiny Cupid Proof That BYU Students Love Nanotechnology":* *Wired*, *Yahoo*, *Discovery*, *Gizmodo*, *CNET*, and others highlighted the winning entry in a technology competition that showed how to build carbon nanostructures to make filtration systems.

*"Research Shows Stepdads How to Avoid Missteps":* The parenting writer at the *New York Times* reported this study performed by a faculty professor and a student coauthor who is now going on to study for a PhD in social work at the University of North Carolina.

*"BYU Animators Take Home First-Place 'Student Emmy' for Estefan":* The Center for Animation won its twelfth College Television Award in ten years. The *New York Times* ran an in-depth article focused on the motivation

and professional success of our student animators under the headline "When Hollywood Wants Good, Clean Fun, It Goes to Mormon Country."

Not to be outdone, our BYU engineering students built a car that registered a top mark of 1,331 miles per gallon in a national competition. The video made of this great success had more than 56,000 views in less than two weeks. Unfortunately this vehicle is slightly too small to accommodate a person of my size.

Well, we could go on and on. I have mentioned only a sample of the great work and contributions that are increasingly recognized and that are also bringing questions from good people who are interested in why BYU does some of the things it does.

Although not as well publicized or perhaps recognized, a great deal is also accomplished and contributed by a host of campus organizations and groups. In our Center for Service and Learning, for example, almost 25,000 student volunteers gave over 125,000 hours of service to more than thirty different service programs and initiatives as well as to countless individuals. We are very grateful for and proud of our students and our community for the service they render in ways that stretch far beyond our campus.

Now, if I might, I would like to spend my few concluding moments with you reflecting on the scriptural theme of our annual university conference from Psalm 25:9: "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way."

At first blush a university might not be the first place one looks to find examples of meekness, and it is not likely that a focus on finding models of meekness would be on university presidents. Neither I nor Vice President Webb, who will also speak to this theme this afternoon, wish to suggest that we personally deserve better or different expectations. It is because we believe meekness is not only good

in the general sense but is very important in our own context, both individually and institutionally, that we address it.

As I have tried to honestly and somewhat dispassionately analyze some of my own mistakes and ways that I have handled matters less optimally than I should have, I conclude that a deficiency of meekness and associated virtues were chief contributors. Stated another way, if I had been more meek, more patient, more understanding of the challenges or problems facing others, and more willing to attribute positive motives rather than worrying about negatives, it is quite possible that my judgment would have been improved and I might have been more open to being taught by the Spirit in my actions.

As I try to make the case for the need for more meekness, I emphasize that those who believe this virtue to be synonymous with weakness or vacillation do not understand the scriptural connotation that I believe we should embrace. Sensitivity is not weakness, and the willingness to learn and then change an approach or a position is a very positive dimension of meekness. Likewise, patience is not vacillation but rather the recognition that many appropriate solutions and resolutions occur only in the process of time.

The Topical Guide in our LDS scriptures suggests that words similar to *meek* or *meekness* include having a contrite heart, being humble or having humility, and being poor in spirit or being teachable. I think all have application for us and for BYU.

Many years ago I read with some interest the description of Moses in the book of Numbers. I suppose that I was not unique in thinking of him as a very strong, forceful, courageous leader and prophet who was called and trusted by the Lord. Candidly, meekness never occurred to me as one of his characteristics, but these are the words of description from Numbers 12:3: "Now the man Moses was

very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth."

Moses was a lot of things, but he was not wishy-washy or insecure in what he felt the Lord wanted him to do. He was courageous but careful. While perhaps initially resistant, he did accept counsel. He also gained understanding of his effectiveness when he acknowledged that he was much better in accomplishing his objectives with the help of others. This was evidence of his deep and genuine meekness.

I think we are all familiar with the experience Moses had with his father-in-law, Jethro. The practical advice about administrative delegation given to Moses is applicable and useful to all who have any leadership or administrative responsibilities. Let me share these verses from Exodus 18:13–24:

*And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening.*

*And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?*

*And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God:*

*When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws.*

*And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good.*

*Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.*

*Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God:*

*And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do.*

*Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men [and women], such as fear God, men [and women] of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:*

*And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.*

*If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace.*

*So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said.*

Moses then understood the wisdom that Jethro already had. That is, that counseling with colleagues and delegating responsibility are not signs of weakness but rather evidence of effectiveness in moving the cause forward. I am grateful that BYU has had a tradition consistent with this approach from the very beginning.

My gratitude continues to expand with my several years of experience here concerning the dedication, devotion, and competence of those who occupy the various levels and varieties of management and leadership responsibility here at BYU. Unlike the world generally and what typically occurs in many universities, department chairs, deans, managing directors, and other responsible senior leaders at BYU do not seek these positions. On the contrary, most who accept these invitations to serve do so with some reluctance but finally agree because of the love they have for our students, our colleagues, the university, and the faith that we represent.

Likewise, today—and I hope always—I express my profound gratitude to a board of

trustees who make virtually all that happens here possible. Unlike any other institution of our size and complexity, we are supported in uncommonly generous ways. In addition, we have the great privilege of tremendous financial support, prayers, and encouragement from literally thousands who sustain us and cause the work to progress even faster than would otherwise be possible.

This is really a wonderful time to be at BYU. Yes, there are many problems and challenges in the world, and we are not completely immune from most of them. On the other hand, the university has never been better positioned to continue to move ahead in its quest to become the best that it can be. We have the sure understanding that what has and will transpire here is part of heaven's plan for the educating and uplifting of the children of God. This applies directly, of course, to those privileged to be here but also includes many who are influenced and educated for good by those who enter BYU to learn and then go forth to serve in ways members of our community demonstrate throughout the world.

As I conclude, let me again thank all of you and those who support us in various levels and varieties of ways for what is done to make this great enterprise of BYU possible. Let me also bear my solemn witness of the truthfulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and the absolute reality and interest of our Father in Heaven and His Son in what transpires here. Our prophet leaders are in touch with heaven, and their support, together with the efforts of so many others, makes this university one of the crown jewels of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.