

What Is Your Personal Ranking?

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In the last two months, Tuesdays have become special days in the lives of most BYU students and friends. It is the day when the TV and radio stations and newspapers announce BYU's ranking. Today, before leaving to come here, I asked my secretary, "What is BYU's rating this week?" I didn't say anything about football. I was told, "They are No. 4 in the nation." Being ranked in the top three or four of the nation in football is not only a new high for BYU but a worthy achievement. I wholeheartedly commend Coach LaVell Edwards, his associates, and team members on their rating and winning their ninth straight WAC championship last Saturday.

It is my understanding that college football teams are basically ranked according to the number of wins and losses, who their opponents were, and by points scored or allowed. I suppose there are some weeks when some frustrated coaches think that those who determine the rankings take into consideration the color of the uniforms as part of the formula. However, I am not here today to quarrel with those who put out the rankings. I am here to talk about the words "remember" and "rank."

Perhaps at this time of the season the best pep talk BYU coaches could give their football players would be in the form of a sign in the

locker room saying "Remember." *Remember* what you have been taught. *Remember* it takes total individual commitment to the team effort to make a team work. *Remember* self-pride and self-discipline. *Remember* no team is better than the performers who comprise it. *Remember* no player is worth much who thinks he is more important than the team. *Remember* you won't maintain a high ranking if you don't remember. *Remember* words of praise and high ratings are damaging if they dull your memory. *Remember* I am to be a class person on a class team.

"Remember" is defined as "To retain in the mind and keep carefully in memory." For our purposes today, "rank" is defined as the degree of worth or excellence compared with others in the same category.

I believe the best-educated student or faculty member is the person who learns much, shares much, and remembers to implement the worthy in to his life.

Marvin J. Ashton was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 6 November 1984.

Teachings to Remember

During the recent October general conference, all of us were encouraged to read and reread the Book of Mormon. Perhaps additional worthy counsel could be, as you read, train yourself to remember the words and feelings experienced.

In reading the book of Helaman recently, I was greatly impressed with Helaman's emphasis in talking to his sons Nephi and Lehi about the importance of *remembering*. The people of his time had success when they remembered his teachings. They failed when they forgot.

Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good.

[Helaman 5:6]

Helaman gave his sons the names of Nephi and Lehi so they would remember their first parents who came out of Jerusalem. Remember and honor their great names, he pleaded. Remember them because they were good, he emphasized. Helaman's sons gained strength and high rating as they remembered.

Teachers do students a great favor when they not only encourage them to study, but to retain and remember. Only when we remember and apply the worthy are we truly educated. An important part of true education is remembering people whose conduct helps us to do better. They are a light on dark days. They give us direction when life's paths become cluttered.

Friends to Remember

With this in mind, let me share five friends who rank very high with me. I will be most

pleased if you will remember them and what they teach us. Three of them are on this campus. One is affiliated with another college campus forty miles or so to the north. Three will not be identified for privacy reasons. The fourth's conduct has been a constant example of stability even before the gospel of Jesus Christ was restored in this last dispensation. Obviously they are not ranked in any order.

Act Instead of React

Mary Jones, not her real name, is a relatively unknown, unranked student-body member of BYU. She is now a returned missionary. I first met her in the mission field after she had served just three months. She was a convert of less than a year. After the usual "I'm pleased to meet you," I said, "How are things going?"

She said, "Pretty well." Now, when missionaries tell me things are going pretty well, I know they are not going very well.

I said, "Is there something I can help you with?" She answered, "Oh no, everything is going pretty well."

I said, "Tell me what is keeping it from going very well."

She said, with her chin quivering, and responding from my insistence, "Well, I've been in the mission field three months. I've been a member of the Church for one year. During the three months I have been in the mission field I have not had one letter from anyone. When I joined the Church my parents disowned me. They want nothing to do with me. Elder Ashton, what can I do?"

The only thing I could think to suggest to her at that time was, "Even though your parents have disowned you and won't write to you, do me a favor and write them every week. Write without fail; write without response; write without feelings."

She is home from her mission attending school here and doing very well. Just the other day she greeted me and said, "Elder Ashton, I

want you to know that my Mom and Dad are writing to me.”

Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose . . . the way of eternal life. [2 Nephi 10:23]

This Mary Jones will continue to improve her personal rating as she remembers to act and not react.

The Lord Loves Men and Women of Integrity

Second is Hyrum Smith, the older brother of the Prophet Joseph Smith, faithful all his days. I like to study and read about Hyrum Smith because he rated very high with his Heavenly Father. We have an opportunity to be ranked high in the kingdom of God and on earth if we will do the same. Simply stated in Doctrine and Covenants 124:

And again, verily I say unto you, blessed is my servant Hyrum Smith; for I, the Lord, love him because of the integrity of his heart, and because he loveth that which is right before me, saith the Lord. [D&C 124:15]

The Lord loves men and women of integrity. The Lord is pleased with those who love that which is right.

In football terms, Joseph Smith was a captain and quarterback. Hyrum was strong on defense.

It is significant that at the time of the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Carthage Jail on June 27, 1844, Hyrum, this great defender, this tremendous friend of the Savior, was shot first and fell, calmly saying: “I am a dead man!”

Let us remember why Hyrum ranks high. He remembered to love that which is right. He loved the right, and his brother more than life itself.

Go Forward Humbly

Third is Mary Smith, not her real name. She is also a relatively unknown, unranked student-body member of BYU. She is on campus today a little older than most of you. Her education was delayed while she and her widowed mother financed a brother and son through the mission field and this institution.

Maybe her delay will limit her chances for the pleasures of courtship and marriage. She’s the kind of a gal I like to remember because she is willing to put others first and take her chances as she walks uprightly before her Heavenly Father with priorities that are firm and with goals that are lofty. Humbly she goes forward—not passively, but humbly. I would like to include here a statement from Alma 38:14.

Do not say: O God, I thank thee that we are better than our brethren; but rather say: O Lord, forgive my unworthiness, and remember my brethren in mercy—yea, acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times.

I would like to say in passing that Mary is one of the most selfless people I can remember.

Remember to Take Courage

Let’s identify number four as Harry, another person I will always remember and want to. Last week I went to the hospital to visit my friend Harry. He is slowly recovering from heart surgery that involved five bypasses. Despite great discomfort and distress physically, his attitude is excellent. During our visit he reached through sheets and tubes, took my hand and said, “Marv, say a prayer for me, will you please?” While I prayed he strongly gripped my hand. His grip was more than strong. It was powerful. Why?

In normal life Harry walks with his hands and arms. He’s been confined to a wheelchair for dozens of years. His mobility is determined by his hands and his friends. Harry and his

wife, Margaret, will always be remembered by me as two of my best friends. Every time I talk to them I get a new lift from life. I remember him when I need courage. I remember him when I'm inclined to be discouraged.

I wasn't going to identify Harry, but I think I will. He's the head tennis coach at the University of Utah. His teams have won enough WAC tennis championships to make other coaches think about coaching from a wheelchair.

Build Your Foundation

President Jeffrey R. Holland ranks very high on my rating list because:

1. He *remembers* to promote excellence in every academic department of BYU, within the framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. He *remembers* to enforce lofty standards of conduct for all on the campus so they may develop self-discipline, self-respect, and self-reliance. (Some of you may resist and resent, but I promise you as you mature you'll remember it was for your best good.)

3. He *remembers* to listen and counsel without prejudice even when he doesn't have time.

4. He *remembers* to administer with love and purpose when some would provoke him to anger.

5. He *remembers* when disappointments and discouragements surface to choose hope over despair.

6. He *remembers* the importance of smiling particularly on days when it would be easier to cry.

7. He *remembers* to love and court his wife and sweetheart, Pat, with sincere affection and respect on a steady basis.

8. He *remembers* the importance of taking time to be a good father. Family members Matt, Mary, and Duffy are not just children on the squad. They are the heart of the team! And President Holland and Pat remember to take the time to tell them so.

9. He *remembers* that when he is my doubles partner in tennis he has to do most of the work.

10. He *remembers* to share his strong personal testimony in words similar to those spoken by Helaman:

And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation.

[Helaman 5:12]

A Nameless Friend

Let me share with you one more friend. We don't even know his name. Nevertheless I would have us all remember him.

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself.

And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion in him,

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own

beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

And he said, He that shewed mercy on him.

Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. [Luke 10:25–37]

Oh, how powerful in the processes of learning are good lives! The Good Samaritan—we don't even know his name, but what a lesson, what an example.

I would humbly ask all within the sound of my voice to do me a special favor. Put a sign on your wall, on your desk, or fasten one to your mirror. Just let it have one word. The word is "Remember." I promise you without any hesitation it can help in your ranking with yourself and God.

Remember BYU football players who get knocked down, but won't stay there.

Remember the Savior. He is Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, our Redeemer, our advocate with the Father.

Remember he said, among other great truths, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).

Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of the Lord. "For I will forgive their

iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:34). I hope you believe that. That is the kind of a Savior I believe in. If we repent, if we remember him, the things that we have done will not be remembered by him.

Remember God lives. *Remember* God loves you. *Remember* to pray to him frequently. *Remember* that as his children you are special.

What is the reward for those who rank high with the Lord?

Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am. [D&C 93:1]

What is BYU's ranking? What is your personal ranking? I thank God we have the right and responsibility to determine that ourselves.

Remember, O remember, the Church of Jesus Christ is true. Remember with God's help we can know and share good cheer and happiness now and in all the days ahead. Today is a new beginning. Today is a new opportunity. I bear my testimony and share my witness that one of the greatest values and strengths in my life is not only to read and know the Savior, but to remember what he taught and remember who he is. I leave you this my testimony and my blessings in the worthy name of Jesus Christ. Amen.