

“To Thine Own Self Be True”

MARILYN S. BATEMAN

This is an inspiring sight—even a thrill—to look over this vast congregation. President Bateman and I welcome all of you to the 1997 fall semester at Brigham Young University. We hope all of you are happy to be here. We also hope that you appreciate the privilege it is to be at BYU. We are confident that each of you has determined in your mind and heart to live a life consistent with the honor code to which you have signed your name. Your honor and integrity are at stake.

Abraham Lincoln said, “Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it” (address at Cooper Union, New York, 27 February 1860). There should be no question in anyone’s mind regarding their responsibilities and duties at the university. May God help each of us as his covenant people to “arise and shine forth” and “be a standard for the nations” and a light to the world, as the Lord has commanded (D&C 115:5).

The education you receive here will be of the finest quality. Our able faculty are prepared—the rest depends on you. But there is more to Brigham Young University than just a secular education. President Spencer W. Kimball said:

The uniqueness of Brigham Young University lies in its special role—education for eternity—which it must carry in addition to the usual tasks of a university. This means concern—curricular and behavioral—for not only the “whole man” but for the “eternal man.” [Spencer W. Kimball, “Education for Eternity,” Preschool Address to BYU Faculty and Staff, 12 September 1967, p. 1]

As we interact together at BYU, each person is involved in the ongoing process of educating the eternal within us. We are told in the scriptures that members of the Church are given special gifts of the Spirit for the benefit of those who love our Heavenly Father and keep his commandments. Brigham Young said, “The gifts of the Gospel are given to strengthen the faith of the believer” (JD 10:324). In section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants, it says:

All have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every [person] is given a gift by the Spirit of God.

Marilyn S. Bateman, wife of Merrill J. Bateman, gave this devotional address on 9 September 1997.

To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby. [D&C 46:11–12]

Each of us is unique and in our own special way different from everyone else. We have been given gifts and talents by the Spirit of God that make us distinctly who we are. As we share our talents with others, we bless them—and they bless us with their gifts. We come together as parts of a whole, as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12. The body needs each part in order to function properly, to bless the lives of each member. We come together as members of Christ’s church to share talents and the gifts that we have. As one shares leadership abilities, another shares the gift of love. Someone else shares their musical talents. We strengthen one another’s testimonies as we express our feelings about the Savior and his gospel. Within the Church some teach, some testify, some lead—all have the opportunity to share and develop their talents.

We are given a commandment that when we are assembled together, we are to “instruct and edify each other” (D&C 43:8). In Moroni 6:5 we are told, “The church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls.”

A number of years ago President Bateman and I left our home in the United States to live in Ghana, West Africa. It was in the 1960s. There were no members of the Church in Ghana then. President Bateman was a lecturer in economics at the University of Ghana. He was also engaged in research for his doctoral thesis. Our family consisted of Merrill, myself, and two little boys—Michael and Mark. Michael was three years old, and Mark was 10 months old.

At the time Ghana’s population was about 7 million people. You cannot imagine how lonely it was. We had been given permission by President Hugh B. Brown of the First Presidency to hold sacrament meetings in our home. Each

Sunday we gathered together, and President Bateman would prepare, bless, and pass the sacrament to our little boys and me. We would sing Primary songs and tell the children stories about Jesus, and then President Bateman and I would share our testimonies of the gospel and our love for our family. We had one another’s companionship, which was wonderful, but it was lonely. We missed the association and strength that comes from being a part of a ward or branch where we could serve and be served. We missed the diversity of gifts that are found in a larger group. We missed the friendships that exist among brothers and sisters in the gospel who share common goals and principles of truth.

Our daughter, Michele, has an egg collection. I am amazed at the variety of eggs she has assembled. I find the variety and uniqueness of each egg intriguing. There are large eggs and small ones. Some are beautiful, others are plain, and still others are very colorful. Some of Michele’s eggs are hard and cold. Others are fragile and intricate. Each egg is different from the rest, but each is appealing in its own way. I have often thought how like people her eggs are. We are all children of our Heavenly Father, yet, like the eggs, we are different from one another—different in size and shape; different in coloring; different in decorativeness and in plainness. Some of us are hard and others fragile. Some people, like some eggs, look alike. We have twin daughters: Merilee and Melisa. In appearance they are quite similar. Some people think they look just alike. When they were younger they were often treated as one. But they did not want to be treated the same. They wanted to be appreciated for their differences rather than for their sameness.

The differences in us make life interesting. Think how boring an egg collection would be if all the eggs were alike.

There are two important pieces of knowledge that we need to understand and internalize to be happy. The first is that we are

children—spiritual children—of our Heavenly Father. There is divinity within us. Every person on this earth is a child of God. Every one!

Second, our Heavenly Father loves us. He has endowed us with gifts of the Spirit that make us uniquely who we are. Our challenge is to know our real self—to live lives congruent with the Spirit inside us.

Because we were successful as spiritual children, we were given the opportunity to come to earth and be proven, to see if we would “do all things whatsoever the Lord . . . command[ed]” (Abraham 3:25). We are to continue our progress on this earth by being “added upon” (Abraham 3:26). We were born to succeed.

One of Satan’s aims is to distract us from being successful. He would have us believe that success is something that it really is not. Satan’s plan is full of half-truths, and he tries to lure us into accepting his counterfeit interpretation of life.

For instance, Satan would have us measure our worth and that of others by the standards of the world. He would have us believe that we should all be cast from the same mold—we should look alike, act alike, and even think alike to be in style—to be correct. Consequently we become preoccupied in trying to measure up to the fads and thinking of the day. We become more concerned about whether our clothes are in vogue than if they are modest and appropriate. “Modesty in dress and language and deportment is a true mark of refinement and a hallmark of a virtuous Latter-day Saint. . . . Shun the low and the vulgar and the suggestive” (Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Young Women of the Church,” *Ensign*, November 1986, p. 83).

The world would have us be more anxious about how we look and what we weigh than how healthy we are. A proper diet, appropriate exercise, and plenty of rest keeps our bodies, our minds, and our spirits in the best state of health. Anything else robs us of our full potential. Eventually a price is paid if we do not take care of our bodies.

We are often more into “political correctness” than “spiritual correctness.” The world would have us believe that our happiness comes from other people’s reactions to us. We use radarlike signals to measure how we look, how we act, and what we think and say. We send out signals—feelers—to others. These signals bounce back. When others find our actions congruent with their thinking, they send positive signals. We interpret those signals to mean that we are of worth. Our interest in others often depends on the signals we receive rather than on genuine feelings within.

In contrast, gifts of the Spirit, especially charity, are like a gyroscope. They are internal. Like a gyroscope they are steady and sure amidst the changing fads of the world. As part of our education for eternity, we must seek a principle-centered life. This is a life where the gyroscope—our real self—maintains an equilibrium and direction based on eternal truths rather than on the signals generated by others. Knowledge of our inner self lifts us above criticism, above discouragement, and above failure—“This above all: to thine own self be true” (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, line 78). I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.