

Gathered in the Tops of the Mountains

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What a wonderful sight you are—students, faculty, and staff literally gathered from the four corners of the earth in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, wherein he said:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

. . . Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. [Isaiah 2:2–3]

You are gathered in the tops of the mountains to learn of the Lord’s ways—both sacred and secular. You have made the journey walking in His paths with a desire to continue. Welcome to the weekly devotional—a hallmark of Brigham Young University, where those who attend have the opportunity to be taught by the Lord’s Spirit and by His servants. We extend a warm welcome to the many missionaries who have returned, the large number of new freshmen and transfer students, and almost 20,000 continuing students. You are 29,000 strong and are numbered among the finest young people on earth. All of you are children of Israel—literal or adopted descen-

dants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As their children you are entitled to the Lord’s blessings promised to them as you follow in their footsteps.

Last week I participated in the marriage sealing of a young couple in the Salt Lake Temple—the house of the Lord Isaiah saw in vision. The sealing ordinance is one of the supreme blessings inherited from Abraham. In that ceremony, the young couple were promised all the blessings of their forefathers if they would be faithful. They were promised the blessings of the priesthood, a righteous posterity, a homeland, and a kingdom. For some the homeland is in the Middle East. For others it is in the Americas. Or it could be on any of the other continents: Europe, Asia, Africa, or Australia. The spiritual kingdom for which the faithful are striving is the one promised by Christ when he said: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

Merrill J. Bateman was the president of Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 7 September 1999.

As I watched the young couple lay claim to their spiritual birthright, I was impressed with the power of knowing and having faith in one's relationship to Abraham and Sarah, to Jacob, to Joseph and his brothers. We are Israel! We are inheritors of the Lord's promises to our ancient forefathers. One of the most powerful and distinguishing doctrines of the restored gospel is the notion that the Bible is about us, that we are part of the biblical narrative. Although the rest of Christianity applies Bible teachings to their lives, it is our belief that the Bible was written by our ancestors, who saw our day and left messages for us.¹ Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets saw in vision the restoration of the gospel in the last days, the gathering of Israel, the stretching of the Lord's tent across the earth, the building of latter-day Zion and its temples, and stakes being strengthened as a refuge from the storm (see Isaiah 2:2–3; 29; 54:2–4; Jeremiah 29:14; 31; 32:37–40; Ezekiel 37:15–23). And, may I add, Isaiah saw us at Brigham Young University.

As the children of Israel, we invite you to sup from the Lord's table of learning at this great university where both spiritual and temporal foods are served. We welcome you to the most beautiful campus in America. The buildings are clean, the grounds are paradisiacal, and the Spirit is present. The library addition is complete, the sidewalks and plaza are in place, and the landscaping is almost finished. We invite everyone to become familiar with and use the magnificent, state-of-the-art, underground library. The new building is literally a temple of learning. The glass entryway is stunning as it allows the surrounding landscape and mountains to come inside and combine with the marbled granite floors and stairways. The wood paneling on each level is a work of art. As you walk down the stairs and enter the periodical area, notice how perfectly the wood grain has been matched from one panel to another. Notice the quality of the tables and chairs. Every study table is wired for laptops

with connections to Route Y. You will find more sunlight in the new underground library than in any other building on campus.

It is our hope that everyone will respect this new facility and its contents. Please remember that this campus is different in that the grounds and buildings have been dedicated by prophets as temples of learning and they belong to the Lord. All of us are the Lord's guests while at the university.

Recently I shared with the faculty and staff some key events from BYU's history. During the preparation of the material, some insights were gleaned with regard to the special nature of this institution. Today I wish to share a few of them with you. Also, four institutional objectives developed during the past year were discussed at the Annual University Conference. They are not new. They are implied by BYU's Mission Statement written in the 1980s and the aims formulated in this decade. In a succinct manner, however, they outline the standards and aspirations set for the university by the board of trustees. I wish to examine them from a student's point of view.

Lessons from BYU's History

The first lesson one learns in reviewing BYU's history concerns the extraordinary faith of the early Saints who forged this institution. They founded Brigham Young Academy in a desert with a fragile economic base. However, they understood the importance of education, especially for their children, and were willing to sacrifice every temporal asset they had in order to keep the school alive. This was true of the faculty and staff and also of the citizens throughout the valley. It was not uncommon for Karl G. Maeser and his staff to receive less than one-half pay during the 1880s. Abraham O. Smoot, a highly successful businessman, stake president, mayor of Provo, and chairman of the board of Brigham Young Academy, gave his buildings, his land, and mortgaged his home in order to save the institution. He died

penniless, having given everything to the school.

The faith of BYU's founders was never stronger than during times of crisis. I was particularly impressed with Karl G. Maeser's conviction as he responded to Reed Smoot, a student, during the 1884 fire that destroyed the academy's only building. As it became apparent that they could not save the Lewis building, the student said to Maeser, "Oh, Brother Maeser, the Academy is burned!" Maeser responded, "No such thing, it's only the building."² Six years earlier, shortly after the death of Brigham Young, Maeser had a dream in which President Young showed him the design of a new building. At the time Brother Maeser did not understand the purpose of the dream. Six years later, as he looked at the charred ruins of Lewis Hall, he could see in his mind's eye the building that would take its place.³

The second observation one notes while looking at BYU's history is the strong link forged between the university and the heavens. Each time a crisis threatened the survival of the school, the heavens were opened and instructions given. Principal Maeser's dream about the new building was the first. A second occurred a few years later in the mid-1880s. During one of the darkest hours, when it seemed that the school would close, Brigham Young appeared to President John Taylor, assuring him of the school's importance in the kingdom and giving him instructions for its survival. In the dream President Young said that "Christ himself was directing, and had a care over [the] school."⁴

On another occasion, Karl G. Maeser had a dream in which he was shown the university of our day. This dream was given to at least two other persons during the early part of BYU's history. The dreams assured the continuance of the university by showing the upper campus "filled with buildings—great temples of learning" with thousands of students attending. (This morning as I stood in the Smoot

Building and looked out on the new quad and saw students crossing in every direction, I believe I saw what Karl G. Maeser saw in 1885.) When Karl G. Maeser received the dream, the university did not have a building and only a few students. He told his wife and daughter that he wanted to do his "part in contributing to the fulfillment of that dream."⁵

A second time the vision was given to a student as well, young Alfred Kelly. He was scheduled to give a commencement address and to also encourage the sale of the upper campus so the school's debts could be paid. He was troubled by the assignment and had written and discarded a number of speeches. The following is an account of Kelly's experience as recorded by B. F. Larsen, who was president of the graduating class at the time Kelly gave the speech.

Finally one morning with a feeling of desperation he walked toward Temple Hill. He stopped to rest and think when he reached the hill top. . . .

He partially closed his eyes and was startled. He stood as if transformed. The advancing sunlight suddenly assumed the appearance of people. The trees, the bushes, the ripples on the surface of Utah Lake, everything in the valley disappeared. Only people were there, young people moving toward Temple Hill. Hundreds of people, thousands of young people came into view advancing with the warm sunlight to the place where this campus is now built. . . .

. . . The whole of the present campus was illumined beyond the power of description and Kelly saw buildings here, not homes but temples of learning, large buildings, beautiful buildings, buildings which covered the top of this hill.⁶

At the commencement Kelly shared his experience. The message was so powerful that Jesse Knight, touched by the Spirit, came forward and offered his resources to save the campus.⁷

The third time the vision was given, Sidney B. Sperry, a faculty member, assured his colleagues that the university would not be sold or given away. His dream occurred in the early 1930s during the depths of the depression. He had just learned that New York bankers had told President Heber J. Grant that a loan to the Church was conditional on the closing of Brigham Young University. Brother Sperry went home heartsick that evening but was

*awakened in the middle of the night and saw a vision of the Brigham Young University of the future. He saw beautiful modern buildings extending along the entire east bench and saw great concourses of people coming to the University to receive guidance and instruction. In connection with the University he saw a temple and therefore knew that . . . BYU was going to remain a Church institution.*⁸

It is interesting to note that the vision of thousands of young people gathering on Temple Hill in beautiful, modern buildings was given to a head of the institution, to a faculty member, and to a student. There is a law that begins, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses” (2 Corinthians 13:1, D&C 6:28).

A final insight gleaned from the historical review concerns the element of sacrifice. From the beginning, sacrifice has been an operational principle of this institution. Almost everyone associated with BYU has felt a special commitment to its divine mission and has been willing to give whatever was needed in order to move the university forward. I am reminded of Carl F. Eyring, dean of Arts and Sciences in the late 1940s. Besides teaching his share of classes and serving as dean, he also supervised the construction of the Eyring Science Center. He spent evenings and Saturdays doing manual labor on the building. Ill with cancer during the last year of its construction, he died soon after the building was dedicated.⁹ The marvelous building named after him has just been

renovated. It was refurbished rather than razed because of its superior construction. Today it stands as a memorial to this man’s willingness to sacrifice his time, energy, and his life for the university.

As I contemplate the commitment and sacrifice of those who have gone before, I wonder what the Lord expects of us. We live in a time of abundance. Perhaps our call is not one of financial leanness but one of time and commitment to excellence. If Brigham Young University is to reach its destiny of becoming a world-class university, it will happen only if we continue the tradition of sacrifice—a sacrifice of time, talents, and heart to the advancement of truth and knowledge. We must be frugal in the use of our resources, but not in our willingness to spend our time and energy to become the very best. With these insights in mind, we now turn to the four institutional objectives.

Institutional Objectives

The first objective is concerned with the quality of learning at Brigham Young University. The objective relates to the four aims and is as follows:

Educate the minds and spirits of students within a learning environment that

- increases faith in God and the restored gospel,
- is intellectually enlarging,
- is character building,
- and leads to a life of learning and service.

The aims are concerned with the souls of men and women. This institution was established to educate the mind, the heart, and the spirit. Unlike most other institutions that began with these objectives, we have not narrowed our purpose during the past century. Evidence of our continued pursuit of all four aims is found in the Princeton Review’s *The Best 331 Colleges*, published just one week ago.¹⁰ This

edition for the year 2000 randomly sampled 59,000 students at 331 colleges asking questions about academics, campus life, study hours, and other topics. The local press often publicizes the fact that we rank as the number one “stone-cold sober school.” But that ranking is a derivative of something much more basic and important. That ranking reflects the faith of our faculty, staff, and students. To illustrate, BYU ranks number one in the survey with respect to students who “pray on a regular basis.” BYU students were ranked the most religious. We rank in the top 20 in terms of student satisfaction. For me, the most satisfying ranking was the school with the “best quality of life.” If we are true to the university mission, this campus should enjoy an unparalleled quality of life. These rankings speak not only to the spiritual dimension of the university but also to academics and character development. A recent survey by another polling group suggested that BYU continues its academic climb. There is more and more recognition of the university’s intellectual accomplishments across a broad spectrum.¹¹

As students, what is your responsibility with respect to the first objective? First, you have a responsibility to strengthen your testimony while at the university. The faculty, staff, and ecclesiastical leaders can provide you with many opportunities. But the choice is yours. I recommend that you read the scriptures daily, even if only for a few minutes. Accept Church assignments and fulfill them. Make daily prayer a pattern in your life. You cannot afford days without prayer. President Hinckley recently told a congregation of youth:

*You need His help. You cannot do it alone. You’ll come to realize that and recognize that. Live worthy of the blessings of God. Get on your knees and thank Him for His goodness to you and express unto Him the righteous desires of your hearts. He hears, He responds, He answers.*¹²

Next, you must study! It takes approximately three hours of study outside class for every hour in the classroom. If you take 15 hours of credit, you should allocate upward of 45 hours for study per week. That still leaves more than 100 hours for work, sleep, and personal time. I also recommend that you establish personal relationships with faculty and staff. The stretching of your intellect occurs as much through relationships with people as through books.

The second institutional objective is also concerned with learning. It is concerned with the quality of research at BYU. It is defined as follows:

Advance truth and knowledge to

- enhance the education of students,
- enrich the quality of life,
- and contribute to a resolution of world problems.

The second objective is concerned with consequential creative work. It may be done in the laboratory, in the art studio, in the library, in a faculty office, or in a student apartment. It is our hope that this objective will become one of the defining characteristics of the university. We are working diligently to improve our graduate research programs. Just as important, we expect BYU to become a leader in undergraduate research in America. BYU faculty are engaged in making the world a better place. The learning process requires that students participate! You have not come here just to read books under the guidance of a professor. You must become engaged in the research process. This is not always possible as a freshman or sophomore. Often an intellectual foundation must be established before contributing to the discipline is possible. On the other hand, we have outstanding examples of freshmen becoming engaged in research. By the time a student leaves BYU, he or she should have

been involved in a creative project. The student will learn more and be better prepared to contribute to a world awaiting solutions. Freshmen and sophomores, find out what juniors and seniors are doing in the way of research.

The third institutional objective extends the reach of the university to members in other parts of the world. It reads as follows:

Extend the blessings of learning to members of the Church in all parts of the world.

What can a student do to advance the cause of learning among Church members beyond the campus? The first is to serve a mission. You will have an opportunity to teach the gospel to members and nonmembers. You may serve in a foreign country and have a companion who does not speak English. One of the most important skills in today's business world is a command of the English language. Be diligent in helping your companion improve his or her English skills as they help you master their language. Encourage them to attend the institute program when they finish their missions.

Another opportunity is in the area of service-learning internships. At this point in time, there are a small number of openings for students with a command of Spanish or Portuguese to serve in a Latin American country teaching English as a second language or computer skills to recently returned native missionaries. This program is being conducted in cooperation with Church Welfare Services and the CES institute program. We have learned that some Church members in developing countries can double or triple their salaries with four to six months training in English and computers. There are other service-learning opportunities as well.

If you as a student have computer programming skills, there may be an opportunity to work with faculty, the curriculum design unit, or the Division of Continuing Education in preparing a semester-online course for

on-campus use or an Internet course for off-campus use. Last year I was surprised to learn that one of my close friends from West Africa, a freshman, was programming Web courses for Continuing Education. We now have approximately 1,000 students in other parts of the world taking online courses from BYU. This number is expected to increase exponentially over the next few years.

The final objective is:

Develop friends for the university and the Church.

May I use two examples to illustrate the ways in which students can contribute to this objective. The first comes in the form of a letter written to Janet Scharman, dean of Student Life. The letter describes the service rendered by a BYU student to a stranger and the feelings engendered in the recipient:

A few months ago, I was driving home from Salt Lake, and my car broke down on the very dark and snowy main road of Tooele. The snow was coming down hard and . . . the road was very dark. I didn't know what to do, and I didn't want to call my wife . . . and subject her and our six-year-old son to the extreme and dangerous weather conditions. I was thinking about walking the two to three miles home when a car pulled up behind me on the side of the road. I walked back to the car, and the driver asked me if I needed any help. I told him that my car lost power, and I didn't know what could have happened. He said that he'd be more than happy to give me a lift home. . . . I asked where he lived in Tooele. . . . He said he didn't live in Tooele. He was on his way back to BYU, saw that I was broken down, and turned around to help! I couldn't believe it! He had all that driving to do on a dark snowy night, and he took his valuable driving time (and personal safety) to help a total stranger! . . . I explained to him that I was from the California Bay Area, and this type of thing is just unheard of! . . . I was so happy and ecstatic with him that I asked for his name and who

*to write to at BYU. Needless to say, [the young man] was very humble and said, "Oh, don't worry about it, they don't even know who I am. You don't need to do that." I told him that I did need to. . . . Janet, please find [this young man]. Let him know that "they" do know who he is and that BYU should be proud to have someone like him representing their school.*¹³

The story illustrates the power of serving others. When one forgets oneself and reaches out to help a person in need, a friendship begins. It is my understanding that the letter has been made known to our student, and he is to be commended for representing himself and the school so well.

The second story unfolded this summer and centers on the service rendered a foreign government officer by two BYU students from the same country. The official had been assigned by her government to do a special report on the LDS Church. Until the assignment she had been responsible for minority religions in her country. She had completed sometime earlier a PhD thesis on Protestantism in America. In order to complete her study of the LDS Church, she was invited by Church officials to spend three weeks in Salt Lake City and Provo visiting with Church leaders and a small team of BYU faculty.

Three individuals were assigned to host the visitor. One was a professor at BYU who was a returned mission president from the visitor's country. Two were BYU women students native to the country in question. Between the three of them, they arranged housing, meals, appointments, translation, and visits to Temple Square, Welfare Square, and other off-campus sites. They helped her gather information and learn firsthand about the Church.

During the second week the visitor became ill. Having some knowledge of the Church, she asked one of her student hosts if it would be

possible to receive a health blessing. The young student, a recent convert, responded favorably but was not sure who might give the blessing. She asked for a little time. Suddenly she felt a prompting and hurried to the temple. There she met two returned missionaries who had served in her homeland. They accepted the invitation and administered to the visitor. Three days later the government visitor said to her student friend, "Your Church is true!"

The student responded, "Why do you say that?"

The woman then said, "Because of the feeling that was present during the blessing given by the two young men."

One does not know what the government official will do in her personal life with respect to the Church. One does know, however, that a strong friendship exists between the woman and her hosts. The students and the professor who served her during the three-week period have become the woman's close friends. The professor has been invited to attend the meeting at which she will present her report to top government leaders.

Service is the key to friendship. When we give of our time and talents to help others, positive relationships develop.

Brothers and sisters, you have been gathered in the tops of the mountains for a special purpose. You have been seen in vision on a number of occasions. Isaiah said that you would come "walk[ing] in his paths" in order to learn "of his ways" (Isaiah 2:3). Karl G. Maeser, Alfred Kelly, and Sidney B. Sperry saw you by the thousands entering modern buildings on Temple Hill. You have been gathered on this campus to strengthen your testimonies and acquire sacred and secular knowledge that will give you the power to be a righteous influence in this world. May the Lord bless you to this end is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Richard D. Ouellette, "Mormon Studies," *Religious Studies Review* 25, no. 2 (April 1999), 162: In reviewing Philip L. Barlow's *Mormons and the Bible*, Ouellette notes that Joseph "Smith viewed his life as a continuation of the biblical narrative." And, quoting Barlow, Ouellette also observed that "as the Saints trekked to the West, reliving the story of Israel, the 'Mormon identification with biblical peoples, events, and prophecies became experientially more all-encompassing than that of any other major group during the nineteenth century, and probably of the preceding and succeeding centuries as well' (100)."

2. Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 74–75.

3. See *ibid.*, 118–19.

4. See Leonard J. Arrington, ed., *The Presidents of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1986), 109.

5. Wilkinson and Skousen, *School of Destiny*, 85.

6. B. F. Larsen, "Fifty Years Ago," speech given at BYU Alumni meeting, 25 May 1962, B. F. Larsen biographical file, BYU Archives, 4; see also Wilkinson and Skousen, *School of Destiny*, 873–74.

7. See Larsen, "Fifty Years Ago," 5.

8. "Vision of Dr. Sidney B. Sperry," a memorandum by W. Cleon Skousen, 24 September 1975, Brigham Young University Archives, 1.

9. The Carl F. Eyring Science Center was dedicated in December 1950. Carl F. Eyring passed away 3 January 1951; see Wilkinson and Skousen, *School of Destiny*, 379 and 887.

10. *The Best 331 Colleges* (New York: Random House/Princeton Review, 1999); see *Schools Ranked by Category*, 34–43, and section on BYU, 98–99.

11. See "Best Colleges 2000," *U.S. News and World Report* 127, no. 8 (30 August 1999): 84–105.

12. Gordon B. Hinckley, "You Live in Greatest Age of World," *Church News*, 4 September 1999, 3.

13. Letter from Tim Tiernan to Dean Janet Scharman, 2 June 1999.