

# Transitions

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How I love to come to BYU. I like the crunch of autumn leaves and the Y on the mountain. (I really liked the football game on Saturday.) But most of all, I like seeing you—book bags, bikes, comfortable shoes, and *long* shorts. I love and admire the good things you are doing. When I look in your faces, it makes me wish that this visit could take place in my kitchen.

I'd like to begin my message today with a *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoon by Bill Watterson. Calvin is in the front of a wagon with Hobbes hanging on in the rear. Calvin says, "I thrive on change." Hobbes replies, "You?! You threw a fit this morning because your mom put less jelly on your toast than yesterday!" Then Calvin says, "I thrive on making *other* people change."

Most of us like the "idea" of change. I believe that comes from our growth instinct. But in reality, change can cause some discomfort. Throughout our lives, I believe, we will be balancing our need for change—learning and growth—with our other important needs for safety, permanence, and security.

Today I am going to talk about dealing with change in our lives. Some of you are going through transitions right now that are requiring you to change and causing you some discomfort.

Because I spend a good deal of time with young people, I have become aware that a time of change can be a time of increased stress and vulnerability. From my vantage point, I've started to see life as a long series of transitions—adjustments that require us to change. Learning to make healthy transitions is a major factor not only in our learning and growth but in our ability to be successful and happy.

Your transition to greater independence didn't begin when you left home for college. It began when you entered the terrible twos, but back then your parents did most of the changing. You were thriving on making other people change. When the second child is born into a family, the first is displaced and must make some adjustments. When my own children were all in school, we added to our family a Hopi Native American daughter. She shared a room with my youngest daughter, Mary, who was nearly 15. I observed: "No wonder Mary is so well adjusted. She never had to adjust before."

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I am aware of the many adjustments you are making. Listening to college students has taught me that many of *your* major transitions come in three categories we could call the three M's: moves, missions, and marriage. Some transitions are of your own choosing. Some are not, but each requires some change and adjustment.

One student reported that his most difficult experience in life was getting married—even though he isn't married yet. Just the thought of getting married, the very possibility, was stressful—scary because of lack of money to take care of a family and, besides, he *hates* weddings. I had one daughter who hated wedding receptions. I promised she could change into a sweatshirt and jeans at 9:00 p.m. on the night of her wedding reception even if all the guests hadn't yet gone through the line. That was enough security to convince her to go through with her marriage! There is a key in that suggestion. You can build in a feeling of security during change by adding something comfortable and familiar. In this case, for Jane, it was a friendly sweatshirt and jeans. A young child finds security from a favorite blanket or toy when away from home. I've seen a few teddy bears stacked on the luggage at the MTC.

I know a woman whose family success had allowed them to build a new and lovely home for their large family. They decided to give away all of their much-used and older furnishings and start again with everything new. How wonderful! we say. No, it wasn't. She said she would never do that again. The children felt no permanence or attachment to the new things. Some old broken-in "treasures," a sagging sofa or familiar pictures, may have helped as they adjusted to new friends, new neighbors, and new schools. I'm sure you have found that placing some photos, a journal, even a pillow from home can give you a feeling of connection, a sense of heritage and belonging.

Moving is always a major transition, and one most of you are experiencing. You must

leave the familiar for the unfamiliar. You leave behind also a bit of your identity and have to make a new place for yourself.

One student said:

*I felt so utterly alone and friendless when I came to BYU. I wanted to show my independence and chose to move into a dorm with no one I knew. Suddenly, I wasn't a cocky high school senior. I was a freshman at a large university. I felt so small. A lot of tearful prayers brought me close to my Heavenly Father. I found out that he knew me [here] the same way he had known me in my home. . . . I began to sit by people who were sitting by themselves, striking up conversations about goals. I began to have many friends.*

Her friends became her support, and she added, "Heavenly Father helped me find them."

Prayer, which strengthened her relationship with Heavenly Father, gave permanence and security in a time of change.

My counselor in the Young Women presidency, Bonnie D. Parkin, related the experience she had when she went away to college. She has given me permission to share her story. Sister Parkin said:

*I remember in 1959 leaving my home in Herriman, Utah, to attend school at Utah State University. I hadn't been there many days when I became so homesick I was physically ill, and I feared my heart was going to break. [Some of you may know what that feels like.] Worse, I was at the same university that my brother and sister were attending, and yet all I wanted to do was go back to the safety of home, back to the gruff but tender care of my dad, back to the gentle arms of my mother in her warm kitchen. Finally, [the adjustment] was too great, and I found a ride to Herriman. I felt desperately alone as I hugged the passenger door as we were driving past our small school and old ward house. Finally I saw the sign for Dansie's Place—the little store my parents ran on the side of the road. I was home.*

*My parents were, of course, surprised to see me on their doorstep. I was just relieved to see them. I sat with my dad, who was in his big brown leather chair, and sobbed, recounting my heartaches and isolation so many miles away.*

*My dad was a farmer, a tough but tender man. Having served a mission in the depression, he knew something about hardships. . . . He could have rushed to counsel me or called me weak, yet he just listened and held me and finally said, "You don't have to go back if you don't want to."*

*Now, as a parent, I know in his heart he was hoping that I would go back—but he was not going to berate me or force me. He was going to let me decide.*

Then Sister Parkin said:

*I'm sure that at some time long past our Father sat with us in a big celestial chair and said, "You don't have to go if you don't want to." But I know he wanted us to go. . . . We chose to leave him.*

*Knowing I could choose somehow freed me to decide I could return to school. I recognized that the pain and growing would surely continue in many forms, but I also recognized that miles away, in a big leather chair, sat my father, thinking of me, hoping the highest for me, simply loving me.*

A strong and capable person learns to make difficult choices in times of transition. I have learned from experience and from listening to you how important it is to have someone to talk to when we are adjusting to change. Sometimes when we are trying to help others who are struggling, it's easy to make the mistake of giving too much advice. Heavenly Father gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason. He wants us to listen twice as much as we talk. Understanding takes listening. As one student said, "My parents and family had a tendency to do a lot of talking in order to make me feel better, but what I really wanted was just someone to listen and show love."

How many of you are returned missionaries? In a report of Campus Education Week, BYU professor Garth Hanson talked about the vulnerability of a missionary as he or she returns from a full-time mission. That is a major transition. Many of you are having that experience. He gave some suggestions to missionaries that could be helpful to all of us in times of change. He suggested that each person needs a board of directors. You need people you trust to whom you can turn for advice. These mentors may include parents, a bishop, someone in your chosen field, a teacher, a friend, or other returned missionaries. Make a conscious effort to have a group of resource people with whom you feel secure.

I think of my husband as I recall his service as a mission president in Canada. He said he has since learned that his most valuable service as a mission president was in the 10 or 15 years after his mission was completed. In these important years, returning missionaries—young men and young women—need a mentor who knows them, loves them, and understands them. These are the years that you are getting yourselves established in your lives with education, choice of mates, and the important choices of work and family.

One ability that can help any of us in a time of transition is the ability to build a support system. Look for credible mentors who not only listen and understand but can also enlarge your perspective. Sometimes you need someone who can help you consider new options.

Coming home from a mission may involve some grieving not unlike losing a loved one. Loss of relationships—companions, missionaries, and mission leaders—is a change; but the loss of relationships with investigators and members in a distant land may feel like a more permanent loss. Grieving involves some pain. Talk about it. Write about it. Consider our Heavenly Father's perspective. Perhaps he may be thinking, "How wonderful that you

have learned to care so much for others who were different from you. This will help you be a more caring person in all of your future experiences." Your growth will continue, but growth sometimes feels like a loss!

Professor Hanson, in speaking of missionaries, suggested that when you get home you continue the mission rules. (I can hear your first reaction: "No way.") Good habits can become a part of ourselves that give a feeling of permanence and security no matter where we are.

May I give the example of a prominent Church and community leader, a successful businessman? As I give this man's experience, you may want to think of your own life and decide if there are any changes you want to make. A transition is a great time to choose to make positive changes. You can let go of some bad habits and hang on to the good ones. A transition does more than take us from one location to another. It can take us from one behavior to another.

The person in my example said he had a poor tradition for education. He gained his identity when he was young from goofing off and entertaining his friends. He said he missed many of the fundamentals of education, and as he went to junior high and high school, he formed a habit of "cram and survive." There was always tremendous stress for him as he tried to move along with his friends in an academic setting. There were beginning to be great deficits in his early preparation.

After high school this young man decided to go on a mission. He had a mission president who helped him develop his potential. He taught him about discipline and order. It gave him a fresh start. As he followed the mission rules and worked hard, he saw results.

The transition after his mission to university life was a difficult one. He felt as if he were falling back into a hole. He didn't want to lose what he had gained, so he decided to make a plan and make rules for himself. As he made

the transition to a university life, he made the following four commitments:

First, he would never go to class unprepared.

Second, he would review, type, or rewrite notes after each class and before the next class.

Third, he would study with someone smarter than himself. He found a real advantage in study groups because he found it kept him focused on class preparation. It helped him anticipate tests and rehearse possible questions and answers. It also helped him enlarge his own point of view.

Fourth was his commitment to consult his professor if he felt he was struggling. He would offer to repeat assignments or do extra assignments until he mastered the fundamentals. This young man said he was amazed at how quickly he became a top student. Learning from mission rules, he learned to set standards for himself that carried him not only through a successful student life in the university but through a very successful and productive life in the Church and community thereafter.

I really like the idea of a transition being a time we can choose to change our behavior for the better. This change for the better doesn't always happen. Remember the children of Israel who were led by the prophet Moses out of bondage in Egypt? They were left wandering in the wilderness because they could not let go of the behavior that kept them enslaved. This is such a good time in your life to let go of behaviors that would keep you in bondage.

I would like to use an example that may apply to some of you. You will know the things in your own behavior that you want to consider changing. I make this one suggestion because I love you and I care about your future: Let go of crude language if you have let swearing become a part of your vocabulary. Fill your minds instead with the magnificent words that are available to you in this university.

When I hear swearing or crude language in public places, I think of that dangerous

transition between elementary school and junior high school. Sometimes 12–13-year-olds start to spill out harsh words in an effort to protect themselves. Aggressive and unbecoming language becomes like a barbed wire fence wrapped around an inexperienced child. If that happened to you in your growing-up years, let go of that bad habit. Transitions can allow us to modify our behavior in ways that better prepare us and better equip us.

When I think of great words, I think of our prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley. He is an example of one who invested in great words throughout the many transitions of his life. His tremendous capacity has come through a lifetime of experiences not unlike your own. He lost a parent at an early age, struggled to get an education during the depression, and went on a mission. He experienced moves, mission, and marriage. He raised a family while carrying heavy responsibilities and has traveled extensively throughout the world. As he visits comfortably with the kings, queens, presidents, and leaders throughout the world, it is obvious that his commitment to great words and thoughts has become a part of him and has become a constant through the transitions of his life. Some of you heard him say at the groundbreaking for the Harold B. Lee Library addition, “What a marvelous thing is a book.” Also, in a recent Relief Society lesson, I heard President Hinckley quoted:

*When I was a boy we lived in a large old house. One room was called the library. . . .*

*There was quiet in that room. It was understood that it was a place to study. . . .*

*. . . There was no television, of course, at that time. Radio came along while I was growing up. But there was an environment, an environment of learning. I would not have you believe that we were great scholars. But we were exposed to great literature, great ideas from great thinkers, and the language of men and women who thought deeply and wrote beautifully. [Gordon B. Hinckley, “The*

*Environment of Our Homes,” Ensign, June 1985, p. 4]*

He added that not all homes can have a library. Your apartments may have little private space, but he said there can be an area that becomes something of a hideaway from the noises around us where one can sit and read and think. During this time of transition for you, let go of any words in your vocabulary that are unbecoming and follow the example of President Hinckley, who prepared himself by giving permanence in his mind to the words and wisdom of great writers. Times of transition can allow you to make changes through positive choices.

Some of the transitions we go through are not of our own choosing. These transitions are often characterized by a feeling of loss. Sometimes it is the loss of something we expected. Sometimes the loss is very tangible.

One student told of a very traumatic move just before starting high school. She said, “That move ended up being the best thing that could have happened to me.”

One student returned from a mission full of optimism about the future to find his parents going through a divorce. The missionary said, “It was a contradiction to all I had hoped to be true.”

Another student moved not to a new town but to a wheelchair.

One thing we can all learn is that with time and perspective much growth and spirituality can come from transitions, and that is gratifying to know. One student said, “With my parents’ divorce, it has strengthened me to know how important it is to keep a family together.” Even in difficult transitions we can learn important lessons that will help our own future choices.

For some, the postmission transition is the beginning of the premarriage transition because you feel “marriage pressure.” As one who has been single twice and married twice,

I learned in each case I could be a normal and happy person if I made the necessary adjustments—but I remember the pressure. When I was 18, my grandmother would say in a feeble voice (it is the only time she used a feeble voice), “Janette, I hope you get married before I die.” She lived to be 97, long after I married, so she had plenty of time to pressure my cousins, too!

When the time is right for your marriage, it will be a time of transition. The book of Abraham states, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh” (Abraham 5:18). *Leave* means some letting go; *cleave* means holding onto a new and unique one-on-one sacred relationship.

When one student got married, she reported feeling a loss of single friends—a normal feeling for one who has had close roommates and good friendships. Fortunately they are not lost, but the relationships will change and mature.

Some years ago my daughter said her husband felt he lost his sister when he got married. They had been close, and she withdrew a little so she wouldn’t interfere with his marriage. The loss was a temporary one and helped a healthy marriage transition. Their good visits have resumed, to the delight of my daughter, who also enjoys long-distance chats with her own brother.

I remember mourning the loss of college life when I got married just before my senior year at BYU. My husband was in graduate school, so we moved. Our budget didn’t allow two tuitions at once. My graduation came after five children. It is true that a few tears followed my honeymoon, but I knew the decision was the right one for me, and I was learning about transitions—letting go and holding on.

When my husband died in 1988, I remember saying to myself, “Heavenly Father thinks I can do this.” With that heartbreaking disappointment I asked myself, “What do I do when my first choice isn’t one of the options?”

Making an action plan often helps in a time of change. Even increasing physical exercise can help. I have learned, as you have, that we can’t go back to the past. As one student was learning to live on her own, she said, “I realized I would never again be my parents’ ‘little girl.’” She experienced a feeling of loss but also a new beginning and a time of growth.

We should be particularly mindful of one another in times of transition. One student said that the most difficult part of a transition, besides the uncertainty about the future, is the lack of caring and empathy from others.

While I was visiting my son one summer, a ward member related an insightful interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan. You remember in Luke that a certain lawyer had asked the Master what he must do to inherit eternal life. After being told, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . ; and thy neighbour as thyself,” the man asked, “Who is my neighbour?” Jesus told of the man stripped of his raiment who was left wounded, even half dead. Those who might have helped passed him by. In this interpretation the Good Samaritan who rendered service is our Savior, Jesus Christ. It was he who was unaccepted, even despised, by the Jewish people. We then are the wounded. He picks us up and ministers to our wounds and then takes us to an inn. He lingers long enough to be sure there are others to assume our care. He compensates the host for his effort. And then come my favorite words: “Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.” In other words, whatever it takes to help those in need, it is not too much; when our Savior comes again he will repay the debt (see Luke 10:25–35).

Many of us have had a time in our lives when we felt stripped of our security, left alone, even wounded. Many, too, can testify that in times of real difficulty they feel surprisingly supported, even suspended, in warmth and love. Then gradually that feeling

of support starts to leave. It could be a letdown, but perhaps this can be a reminder that a time of healing is a temporary time, and soon we need to start taking more responsibility for ourselves.

The inn is a wonderful symbol. It is a temporary place—a place of transition. How many of us, especially if things aren't going well, would like to take up permanent residence as a guest of life, always expecting others to take care of us? But if we were to make that choice, we would not as likely realize our potential or reach that destination of eternal life. No matter what our past experience, it is important to realize that we must prepare to move on.

After a major change in our lives, the journey seems different, even dangerous. Perhaps loving, even trusting others, is too much risk. Gradually we learn that experience, even difficult experience, can increase our appreciation and our ability to understand and to care for others. Difficult experiences can also increase our capacity to work and deal with challenges.

As we are learning, I believe we all have times that we yearn for that perfect environment when we were with our Heavenly Father. Remember, we will return to him by moving forward, not backward, and in the process we will become changed. Our transitions make possible that change.

Every transition, every change, gives us a chance to choose again to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the principles of his gospel.

Lehi's vision of the tree of life is a reminder of the important elements of healthy transitions. First we must fix in our minds and hearts the destination: the tree of life, eternal life—the perfect “love of God.”

As you study for your Book of Mormon class, review chapters 8 and 11 of 1 Nephi. When we think of the path to eternal life described by Lehi, we see that transitions are

an important part of the journey. In chapter 8, Lehi states:

*I beheld myself that I was in a dark and dreary waste.*

*And after I had traveled for the space of many hours in darkness, I began to pray unto the Lord. . . .*

*And it came to pass after I had prayed unto the Lord I beheld a large and spacious field. [1 Nephi 8:7–8]*

Prayer was the constant in this time of transition in Lehi's vision. He received understanding as he moved along and after he prayed for help. Nephi's understanding came also after he had prayed to know what his father Lehi had seen. Prayer and our relationship with our Heavenly Father can be constants during every transition of our lives. The other major constant in Lehi's vision is the rod of iron, or word of God. Without those constant sources of help—prayer and the words of our Heavenly Father—we might be fooled, as were the people in Lehi's vision. The large and spacious building represents the world and the pride therein. As these scriptures describe that large and spacious building and the behavior of those inside, we do not doubt it is filled with things familiar that give temporary comfort, but the people inside have lost sight of their destination.

Hold fast to the iron rod, the words of Heavenly Father, and keep your minds focused on your destination. It takes inspiration to be able to adapt without compromising your spiritual integrity. When I think of the iron rod, I think of the counsel of the apostle Paul: “Cleave to that which is good” (Romans 12:9). Paul must have understood times of change and transition. In Romans 12:2 Paul gives great counsel applicable to us here: “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

There is security in God's promises to us. According to Isaiah, the Lord has promised to the house of Israel: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee. . . . For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand . . . ; I will help thee" (Isaiah 41:10, 13).

You are attending Brigham Young University, which has as its foundation the gospel of Jesus Christ. Most of you have made promises, even covenants, with the promise of eternal blessings. How grateful we can be

for the atonement of Jesus Christ. It is that gift that allows us to change. We can let go of those things that would hold us down or keep us captive. As we make transitions in our lives, may we forgive, forget, and repent of those things that would keep us from our destination. As we go through transitions and move toward our goals, may we keep our focus on that ultimate destination, which is eternal life. This my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.