

Pure Love

EUGENE H. BRAMHALL

As I have thought about this welcome opportunity, I have concluded that although aging brings some all too obvious changes, there are certain values that are constant, and gratefully so. It was 10 years ago, almost to the day, that I occupied this space as a newly called stake president. Elder Maxwell and Elder Holland, just called to the First Quorum of the Seventy, were on the stand. Although I felt overwhelmed by the call and particularly inadequate in light of the company, I nevertheless spoke of what was in my heart. I spoke of the importance of unity and community; the obligations that the gospel imposes and clarifies for each of us; the personal importance of loving, sharing, giving, and forgiving; and, finally, paraphrasing, the brilliance of a life plan that teaches that only as we lose ourselves in each other can we find the true joy and peace the Savior has promised to each of us.

I illustrated these rather well-understood principles with an experience or two that I hoped would provide a context for what I wanted to accomplish in the years that followed. I note that there are some here today who attended that meeting, and I extend my thanks to you for your love and support, then and now.

I will use some of these same themes today but dress them a little differently. I will speak of love of God and love of man. I hope to illustrate that we can love God *only* as we learn to love ourselves and each other, and then I will draw two or three examples from history to demonstrate the importance of developing the capacity of true, unselfish love that reflects the best of who we are and what Heavenly Father would have us be. In this process, I pray that I can offer an idea or two that will meet a need, satisfy a question, or offer hope. It is my prayer that I will be able to meet your expectations, and I invite your faith and prayers.

I begin by describing a powerful moment in my life that was centered in this building but that actually began in Greece. About 18 months ago, Sister Bramhall and I were in Ephesus. Once a thriving city of tens of thousands and a center of Christianity at the crossroads between Africa, Asia, the eastern Mediterranean, and what is now southern Europe, Ephesus is now only a magnificent ruin. Still, as one walks through its streets, it is easy to recreate with

Eugene H. Bramhall was general counsel and assistant to the president at Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 16 March 1999.

imagination what this wonderful city must have looked like when the Apostle Paul visited there. The dominant structure, still beautifully maintained, is a huge Greek theater, actually an amphitheater, that held 25,000 or so people. Without adding anything to this address, I will digress only long enough to tell you that one tourist, having seen Ephesus for the first time, asked her guide this interesting question: “Why is it that the Greeks built all these ruins?” In any event, it was here that the Apostle Paul spoke to the Ephesians and later wrote to them: “Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

As I sat in that magnificent theater, reflecting on that history and the early beginnings of Christianity, I felt a renewal of spirit that was almost tangible. I was transported back in time to that very moment when an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ poured his heart out to those who would listen, enjoining them to become a part of the movement that would ultimately sweep the world. Paul’s mission was to testify of the Lord Jesus Christ. He spent and ultimately gave his life doing exactly that.

Some six weeks after my visit to Ephesus, I attended a devotional given by Elder Eyring here in the Marriott Center. As I listened and watched all of you at the same time, it occurred to me that this center, which seats approximately 22,000 persons, is no different from that theater in remote Ephesus. I was overwhelmed by the truth that this modern-day apostle held and holds the same priesthood as Paul and has the same mission. Each prophet, ancient and modern, testifies of Jesus Christ as a special witness and serves out of a love of God and of man.

Only two weeks ago Elder Holland, in his first devotional address here since being called as a General Authority in 1989, bore his testimony this way:

I bear witness of the God of Glory, of the redeeming Son of God, of light and hope and a bright future. I

promise you that God lives and loves you, each one of you, and that he has set bounds and limits to the opposing powers of darkness. I testify that Jesus is the Christ, the victor over death and hell and the fallen one who schemes there. The gospel of Jesus Christ is true, and it has been restored, just as we have sung and testified this morning. [Jeffrey R. Holland, “Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence,” BYU devotional, 2 March 1999, pp. 6–7]

The power of that fundamental and basic truth has never been more clear to me than now. I bear my own witness as I begin these remarks that we stand in the midst of giants who by their lives, words, and works carry the Savior’s message throughout the world. We call them apostles and prophets, just as they were called in the days of Jesus and Paul. I also remind you that we at this university, which bears the name of just such a giant, are blessed beyond measure. President Hinckley has remarked that you are a royal generation. I believe that he would include all of us in that term—not only students but also staff and faculty and even administrators. I believe that you and we have been preserved for this day and time to do much in the world that is good and important.

But I also know that each of us stands on the sturdy and steady shoulders of those who have gone before. This morning I will remind you of several bits and pieces of history—some of it relating to the university—that I think you will find interesting as instructive anecdotes. Jeffrey Holland, as president of BYU, once addressed this subject. Speaking of those who have preceded us here, he said:

We owe them something. We who are the beneficiaries of their sacrifice and their faith—we owe them the best effort we can put forward in obtaining a truly edifying and liberating and spirit-soaring education. . . . Take this university forward in the same way your ancestors took it forward—

often with nothing more tangible to sustain them than their dreams and their traditions. [Jeffrey R. Holland, "Who We Are and What God Expects Us to Do," Brigham Young University 1987–88 Devotional and Fireside Speeches (Provo: BYU, 1988), p. 20; emphasis in original]

I am convinced that in order for us to know where we are going and to appreciate what we have, it is important for us to know where we, collectively, have been and to appreciate the sacrifices that have been made for us. Jeffrey Holland, who remarked just two weeks ago of his own unspeakable love for BYU, recounted in a 1987 address something that happened in the early years of the Brigham Young Academy. This remarkable event teaches us about the faith of a young student who was willing to speak of what was surely a prophetic vision and also about the love of the larger Provo community for BYU. As I read this long account, I want you to think of this upper campus as one consisting of the Maeser Building, nearly complete, and several large fruit orchards extending to the mouth of Rock Canyon. Hold that thought. Now, in his talk President Holland had just spoken of Karl Maeser's last visit to his beloved campus. He then told this story:

Several years after Brother Maeser's death a proposal was made to construct a memorial building in his name, not downtown on University Avenue but high atop Temple Hill, where a new campus might be built consisting of as many as three or perhaps four buildings someday. The cost would be an astronomical \$100,000, but the Maeser Building would be a symbol of the past, a statement of aspiring tradition, an anchor to the university's future.

In spite of a staggering financial crisis clouding the very future of the university at the time, the faculty and student body took heart that in 1912 the Maeser Building was at least partially complete and the university would give diplomas to its first four-year graduating class. But even as graduation plans were being made, equally urgent plans were under-

way to sell the remainder of Temple Hill for the development of a new Provo suburb. The university simply had to have the money to survive. Eighteen members were graduating in this first four-year class, but even if the student body tripled in the years ahead, surely there would be more than enough room to accommodate them on the space now occupied by the Maeser, Brimhall, and Grant buildings on our present campus. Yes, the rest of the space on the hill should be sold. The graduation services would conclude with a sales pitch to the community leaders in attendance.

When Alfred Kelly was introduced that morning as the student graduation speaker, he rose and stood absolutely silent for several moments. Some in the audience thought he had lost the power of speech. Slowly he began to speak, explaining that he had been much concerned over his remarks, that he had written several versions and discarded every one of them.

Then, early one morning, he said, with a feeling of desperation regarding his approaching assignment, he walked north from his downtown apartment to where the partially completed Maeser Building stood (as Horace Cummings would later describe it) as an "air castle" come to earth on Temple Hill. He wanted to gain inspiration from this hope of a new campus, but he felt only grim disappointment. The sky was starting to glow from the morning light, but the darkly silhouetted Maeser Building seemed only a symbol of gloom.

Kelly then turned his eyes to view the valley below that was also still in shadow. The light from the rising sun was just beginning to illuminate the western hills back of Utah Lake with an unusual golden glow. As morning came, the light gradually worked down from the hilltops, moved across the valley floor, and slowly advanced to the spot where Kelly stood.

He said he partially closed his eyes as the light approached and was startled by what he could still see. He stood as if transfixed. In the advancing sunlight everything he saw took on the appearance of people, young people about his age moving toward Temple Hill. He saw hundreds of them, thousands of

young people coming into view. He knew they were students, he said, because they carried books in their arms as they came.

Then Temple Hill was bathed in sunlight, and the whole of the present campus was illuminated not with one partially completed building, nor with homes in a modern subdivision, but rather with what Kelly described to that graduating class as “temples of learning,” large buildings, beautiful buildings, hundreds of buildings covering the top of that hill and stretching clear to the mouth of Rock Canyon.

The students then entered these temples of learning with their books in hand. As they came out of them, Kelly said their countenances bore smiles of hope and of faith. He observed that they seemed cheerful and very confident. Their walk was light but firm as they again became a part of the sunlight as it moved to the top of Y Mountain, and then they gradually disappeared from view.

Kelly sat down to what was absolutely stone-deaf silence. Not a word was spoken. What about the sales pitch? No one moved or whispered. Then longtime BYU benefactor Jesse Knight jumped to his feet and shouted, “We won’t sell an acre. We won’t sell a single lot.” And he turned to President George Brimhall and pledged several thousand dollars to the future of the university. Soon others stood up and joined in, some offering only a widow’s mite, but all believing in the dream of a Provo schoolboy, all believing in the destiny of a great university which that day had scarcely begun. (See B. F. Larsen, “Fifty Years Ago,” speech given at a BYU Alumni meeting, 25 May 1962, B. F. Larsen biographical file, BYU Archives, pp. 4–5.) [In Holland, “Who We Are,” pp. 24–26]

Although this is only one example of many, the history of this place reflects the love of the Jesse Knights of this world and also of those like Karl Maeser, who lived nearly in poverty as its president. Because they loved BYU, countless faculty and others were willing to sacrifice (there is that word again) comfort, prestige, and security for a dream. That dream,

of course, is the same dream, in one form or another, that Alfred Kelly had as he thought of a diminished BYU. In one way or another, all of us who have attended this university, who have walked its halls, who have taught here, or who have maintained its grounds or cooked its meals have had the same vision.

King Benjamin says something of this in a different context. Speaking of our youth, he said:

And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God. . . .

But ye will teach them to walk in the ways of truth and soberness; ye will teach them to love one another, and to serve one another. [Mosiah 4:14–15]

King Benjamin also said, “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). The point is that pure love—the love for one another—can and should be a moving, powerful force for good. It is scriptural at its roots, and when it matures it can change us so that we become worthy to enter again into our Father’s presence. If we accept the first and second commandments at face value, it is likely that we will not be worthy to enter into our Father’s presence a second time until we have learned to love one another and to forgive one another—only then will we have also learned to love God.

Paul taught us that there are no strangers among us. And Robert Frost expressed this same idea in his poem *The Death of the Hired Man*, in which the hired man, having nowhere else to go, returned to the home of his former employer to die, even though he was not welcome there. In an important exchange between Mary and her husband, Warren, about love and duty, we are finally instructed about love, rather simply, by Mary, who tells her husband, “Home is the place where, when you have to

go there, / They have to take you in.” Implied in this is the duty of all of us to love, forgive, and care for those who are less fortunate and more dependent than we are. Again, quoting King Benjamin:

And also, ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish. [Mosiah 4:16]

These few verses, of course, of themselves can and perhaps should be the substance of another talk, but their import was reemphasized in 1852 by the First Presidency of the Church (consisting of Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards), who enjoined us in part that we should

seek after knowledge, all knowledge, and especially that which is from above . . . , and if you find any thing that God does not know, you need not learn that thing; but strive to know what God knows, and use that knowledge as God uses it, and then you will be like him; [you] will . . . have charity, love one another, and do each other good continually, and forever. [In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 2:86]

Let me tell you of another contemporary giant who, having learned the lessons of this world in an absolutely brilliant way, also loved this university with every fiber of his being and gave his life in service and sacrifice at Brigham Young University.

In the last weeks of his presidency at BYU, it was decided that Rex Lee would argue a complicated case brought by the ACLU involving BYU’s Off-Campus Housing Program to the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in January 1996. Several of us accompanied Rex and Janet,

his wife, to Denver on January 24. The weather was cold and very wintry. Janet was worried about whether Rex was strong enough to make the trip, but earlier that week he had successfully convinced one of his doctors that it was very important that he go to Denver to make the argument. Any other outcome would have been absolutely unacceptable to him. And so it was that on January 24, this small entourage with Rex in his wheelchair, oxygen bottle on his lap, boarded a flight to Denver. The weather in Denver was bad, we were late getting into the hotel, and Rex was visibly tired by the trip.

The next morning we all left for the courthouse from the hotel in the teeth of a blizzard. It was very cold, and Rex, his little frame bundled up in a magnificent blue overcoat—a gift from his good and special friend, Jon Huntsman—looked terribly frail. But he was full of good cheer, optimistic, and cracking jokes about the handcart company on its way to the Tenth Circuit Court.

We made our way to the second floor of the courthouse to wait for our case to be called. Rex remained in his wheelchair, and the rest of us stood around discussing last-minute questions and generally passing the time. Rex’s good humor had returned, and it was obvious that he was “up” for the argument. And it is here where the true story begins. Rex Lee, a very successful lawyer, university president, law school dean, and solicitor general of the United States (often called the Tenth Justice of the Supreme Court) was in the courthouse, and most of the lawyers who walked by paid their respects either with a nod, a hello, or, in the case of several Salt Lake attorneys, with a warm personal greeting—all with an air of great respect and deference, which Rex clearly appreciated.

Finally our turn came, and Rex wheeled himself into the courtroom and to a spot adjoining one of the counsel tables. When the other lawyers finished their argument, the

attorney for the ACLU took the stand to argue the appellant's side of the case. The courtroom was full of lawyers and some clients, and during the ACLU argument there was the usual bustle and inattention on the part of everyone except those directly involved in the argument. It seemed, at that point, like simply another case—one of perhaps eight or so that morning, one involving a remote issue of law without any far-reaching consequences for anyone except the litigants involved.

At the conclusion of the appellant's argument, Rex wheeled himself to the center of the courtroom, carefully adjusted his oxygen bottle on the floor alongside the wheel of his chair, and reached up to the microphone on the podium, bringing it down close to his mouth so that he might be heard: "Good morning, your Honors. I am Rex Lee, counsel for Brigham Young University." Suddenly there was an air of anticipation. One of the great lawyers of this century was addressing the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. One or two of the lawyers who were working on their own cases set their notebooks down and began to listen. The argument followed, and Rex drew obvious strength from the exchange he had with the judges. His voice was stronger; he was animated; there was a chuckle here and a wise observation there. Soon everyone in that courtroom was watching and listening to the master at work. The place was quiet, like a church. Rex argued. The court responded. Rex, the ultimate advocate, and this fine panel of judges were completely engaged. It was his last argument—clear, lucid, direct, thoughtful, evidencing a magnificent grasp of the cases. He was in his element. It was almost a final sermon. His text was the law, his congregation the court, and his subject was Brigham Young University, his beloved alma mater—its history, its traditions, its values, and its very purpose. It was a place that had touched his very soul, and his love for the university was absolutely clear.

All too soon the argument was over, but Rex had left an absolutely indelible impression, one never to be forgotten, on everyone in that courtroom. From where I sat, it appeared to me that Janet had tears in her eyes, and maybe she, too, recognized that there would be few moments like this left for her dear husband, whom she had so fiercely protected for so long. It was a magnificent moment for us all.

The trip home was hard though, and we arrived in Provo at about midnight. The next day, a Friday, Rex was still full of good cheer, but by the day after that he was back in the hospital, worn and spent. The price Rex paid to make that argument was greater than perhaps any of us realized at the time. I think Janet knew. Rex had given everything he had to the university for a period of nearly 30 years. This was his last gift of love to BYU.

Two men—one a student, the other a university president; one at the beginning of a career, the other concluding his: Each of these accounts, in its own way, reflects their love and devotion to the truth, virtue, and goodness that I believe this great university represents. I had thought earlier about spending more time discussing the abstraction of love as it is embodied in the first and second commandments. It seems to me, however, that these accounts and one or two others demonstrate the essential point that our obligation to love ourselves and our neighbors is second only to our obligation to love God and that learning to love each other, to care for each other, is a learning process—the outcome of which is that we learn better to love God. It seems to me that, in its ideal form, true love represents a perfecting process by which we learn to love well and truly and we develop the virtues of humility, charity, patience, judgment, selflessness, and a hundred other virtues that are recognized, polished, merged, and developed into a character able to withstand the refiner's fire.

We start this process by loving God and then develop that love through service, sacrifice,

gratitude, and giving. And when we have learned to love best, we can be like Mary in Frost's poem; or like General Robert E. Lee, who said, "I pray each day for my enemy"; or like a father whose love for a daughter swells as she announces her intention to serve a mission; or like a new mother who is overwhelmed by powerful emotion when she sees her newborn for the first time; or like the husband who, facing death on the battlefield, writes to his wife:

My very dear Sarah:

The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days—perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more. . . .

Sarah my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me unresistibly on with all these chains to the battle field.

. . . I have, I know, but few and small claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me—perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battle field, it will whisper your name. Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless and foolish I have often times been! How gladly would I wash out with my tears every little spot upon your happiness. . . .

But, O Sarah! if the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you; in the gladdest days and in the darkest nights . . . always, always, and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath, as the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for thee, for we

shall meet again. [In Geoffrey C. Ward, Ric Burns, and Ken Burns, *The Civil War: An Illustrated History* (New York: Knopf, 1990), pp. 82–83; emphasis in original]

Major Sullivan Ballou was killed at the first battle of Bull Run.

Thus it seems to me that our Father in Heaven has given us the first and great commandment to love him with all of our heart, might, mind, and strength, and then he told us how to do that: by learning to love one another.

I will close these remarks with two more simple examples, one contemporary and the other drawn from an experience of about 50 years ago.

One morning as I met with the bishops of the BYU 13th Stake, over which I presided as president at the time, I was moved to talk of the lost sheep as described in the teachings of the Savior. I reminded this group of bishops that Jesus had spoken often of sheep as a metaphor for all of his children. At various times the Savior had told his apostles that "my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27), and he enjoined his apostles always to "feed my sheep" (John 21:16, 17; D&C 112:14). I told these men that in the Savior's wonderful and moving sermon about the good Samaritan, he made it absolutely clear that we are all his sheep, even those who are despised and disregarded by others. I told them that in the Old Testament we are instructed in the clearest way possible that we are in fact our brother's keeper, and I reminded them that Peter, following the Savior's death and resurrection, had perceived "that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34).

Thus I think the reference to "foreigners" in Paul's letter to the Ephesians is particularly important. In any event, on that particular Sunday morning, these bishops accepted my challenge to seek out those within their wards who needed special help and encouragement—to find, in effect, the lost sheep among them.

Later that day, Christopher Germann, one of the younger bishops in the 13th Stake, was sitting in a regional conference next to a young woman who was sitting alone and who appeared unusually quiet and pensive. She looked just like you in your quiet moments. But there was something about her that drew his attention. She was not in his ward, and as he described the event to me later, he had hesitated to speak to her. He felt that he might be intruding on a particularly private moment. But the Spirit was powerful, and I still remember exactly his question to her: “How has your day been?”

She was surprised, but he introduced himself as a bishop, and she gratefully thanked him for asking, pouring her heart out to him in a way that reinforced the teachings of that morning.

Now I will ask you whether you have someone to whom you might address the same question: “How has your day been?” And if someone asks you that question, are you ready to respond and to be moved by their spirit to another place in your life? I will tell you that *right now* there are many here who feel alone, frightened, and inadequate and who need the love and support that one or more of you can and should give. They need that special, careful, driven-by-the-Spirit attention that will bless both you as the giver and your new friend as well. Please reflect upon the experience of Bishop Germann as you remember this hour.

Finally, I will close by telling you of another young man whom I knew well, one whose spiritual life may well have been saved by three college students just like you. At the time they were strangers, but because they were willing to extend themselves, they became critical to the spiritual life of this young student. Here is the story:

A young LDS student attended a large university in the western part of the United States. It was not his choice to do so, and he was very

lonesome and very far from home, friends, and lifelong associations. Indeed, he did not know a soul, either at his university or, for that matter, in the entire state. Miserable, lonesome, and feeling lost, he invested himself in his school-work, ignoring his mother’s constant requests that he attend a local student ward. Weeks went by, and then even a couple of months without any effort on his part at contacting the local LDS student group. His misery deepened, but he was no more inclined to attend church than he had been on that first Sunday. He was not doing anything wrong; it’s just that he was not doing anything really right, either. Today, if asked, he would tell you that his actions were unexplainable, though at the time they seemed absolutely natural. He was slowly dissolving in self-pity, and he would not let anyone or any influence change his life.

And so it was late one Friday afternoon that Leo, Dean, and Skip knocked on his apartment door. Each was attending the same university, and each was involved in the local ward. They had come to invite this young miserable student to a ward outing. In the face of their unremitting encouragement and remembering the gentle proddings of his mother, this young student finally consented to attend the ward outing, where, to his surprise, he had a good time in spite of himself.

He continued his activity in the ward, met the girl he would later marry, quickly found his spiritual roots again, formed lifetime friendships with Leo, Dean, and Skip, and went on to a lifetime of service in the Church.

The year was 1950, the university was the University of California at Berkeley, and I was the miserable freshman student. The girl I met, who then had very pretty blonde hair, became my wife. The debt I owe her and others can never be sufficiently repaid. The spirit of love and caring that I felt at that initial meeting with my dear friends has been the spirit that has carried me from that day to this. I cannot deny it, nor should you. It is the spirit that makes all

of us one, the spirit that brings us all together—not as strangers, not as foreigners, but as brothers and sisters in this ever-broadening kingdom of God.

In closing, perhaps I should apologize for this very personal anecdote. However, I have recited it here because I believe it illustrates, as

much as anything, the importance and timeless relevance of our Savior's teachings. Whatever the circumstances, remember always his admonition: "If ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27).

That we may always have this vision, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.