

High Expectations

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Graduates, families, brothers, sisters, and friends, it is a privilege, pleasure, and opportunity to be with you as we congratulate those we honor—including especially those who have sacrificed for and contributed to all graduates whose names we find in the program. We are especially pleased to welcome Elder Richard G. Scott, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and chairman of the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees. We are grateful for the presence of Sister Susan W. Tanner, Young Women general president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a member of the BYU Board of Trustees, who has been assigned by the officers of the board to conduct today's exercises and speak to us. We also acknowledge the presence of Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Presidency of the Seventy, who is here in his key role as a father and father-in-law, and of Sister Bonnie D. Parkin, Relief Society general president and a member of the BYU Board of Trustees. We recognize with appreciation the many other special friends and honored guests who are with us today. Welcome to all.

As I approach the middle of my second year at BYU and am attending my fourth commencement exercise, I feel to express my continued appreciation for the privilege of

being at BYU. I am grateful for the support of the students, faculty, staff, and administration and for the confidence expressed in all of us by our board of trustees, who provide us with so much and sustain us so well with their counsel, faith, and prayers. My wife, Sharon, joins me in expressing our thanks to all of you and especially to those who have made special efforts of many kinds in our behalf.

It has long been a BYU custom—started many years before my arrival—to share some interesting statistics about our graduates and our university community. It is a remarkable place, and our students are truly remarkable people!

Our youngest graduate is still in the teenage years, and our oldest is a few years older than even I. This represents a span of more than 50 years—which I find to be impressive. Equally impressive is that each graduate is distinctive and distinguished when described by those who know her or him best. Today we will recognize 2,821 total graduates, with 2,429 bachelor's, 355 master's, and 37 doctoral degrees being awarded. Female graduates

Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 12 August 2004.

outnumber their male counterparts by 35, and the men have requested that I refrain from mentioning additional spheres in which the women excel.

Slightly more than half of the class are married, and 51 percent have attended other institutions of higher learning prior to coming to BYU. All of the 50 states but one are represented in the graduating class, which also includes students from 52 foreign countries and one U.S. territory. A quarter of you come from Utah and 15 percent hail from California. Your vastly differing previous experiences and unique perspectives add greatly to the richness of the BYU experience for all of us.

A further statistic that is surprising to many around the world who do not know us well is the tremendous facility so many on this campus have with languages. Seventy-eight percent of all our students report some proficiency with a second language, and this rises to 85 percent with our seniors. Interestingly, 49 percent of you said you acquired your second language at the Missionary Training Center or on a mission, but a full third (33 percent) of you also credit BYU language courses. Over a quarter of our students report that they came to BYU with some pre-university language fluency.

On previous occasions I have reported on the high volume of food and treats served and sold here at BYU. I'll not repeat statistics in this respect except to say that the ice cream, fudge, and pizza consumption continues to be impressive!

As I hope you know, our bookstore provides excellent service and sells many things more than books. I was pleased to learn that the best-selling book ever, excluding the scriptures, is President Gordon B. Hinckley's book *Standing for Something*. I expect and hope that reading and listening to the words of the prophet will be a lifelong habit for all of us, in addition to our other efforts at continuing and continuous learning.

With that thought in mind, let me share a few words from President Hinckley concerning BYU. Many of you have heard his counsel and instruction when he has visited this campus. Last Saturday's *Church News* reported some comments he made during a dedication ceremony at BYU—Idaho a year or two ago. Said he:

Brigham Young University—Provo has become a truly great institution, now recognized across the nation for the quality of the education it provides, for the strength of its faculty, and for its unique and large student body. It is a credit to the Church and will continue to be so. . . .

The mission [of the Church schools] is to impart secular knowledge in a first-class manner while building faith in the Eternal God and His Risen Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*This Church will never fail. Jesus Christ stands at its head. And just as it will never fail, neither will its institutions and programs. [Dedication of the Gordon B. Hinckley Building, BYU—Idaho, 22 October 2002, quoted in "Messages of Inspiration from President Hinckley," *Church News*, 7 August 2004, 2]*

It continues to be my privilege on a regular basis to report that this university is meeting the expectations President Hinckley has explicated and that, further, almost all of the students reflect in their lives and their accomplishments the fruits of this special and wonderful BYU education.

While you have been at BYU, you can certify that our expectations for you have been high. Please also know that as you leave, our anticipations are even higher. Because you have received many of the blessings possible that come from being at BYU, you will make remarkable and ever-stretching contributions as you enter the real world of family, society, church, and work.

Just a week ago, Elder Henry B. Eyring, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

and the Church commissioner of education, gave a remarkable talk that was transmitted worldwide to Church Educational System employees and volunteers. His remarks were targeted to the teachers of our youth—most of whom will not have the opportunity for a BYU experience as you have had. He asked teachers to raise expectations for these young people, and I ask that you continue to have high expectations for yourselves, because we certainly do as well. Elder Eyring mentioned four personal expectations or choices that will allow us to reach our true potential. Let me mention them briefly.

First, we must pray with faith that the gifts of the Spirit will extend us beyond our normal, human capacities. We need not only the hope but the conviction that we will receive revelation when we are worthy and properly prepared to receive it.

Second, we need to choose to trust the scriptures with the simple faith of a child as they speak of spiritual gifts. Note he did not say we should be childish! Although the rigors of a university education usually chase some of the childishness out of us, there is also the risk in the process that we may inadvertently discard the necessary simple faith with which we were blessed as children.

Third, we need to learn to be obedient to the impressions of the Spirit when we receive them. The best way to receive regular impressions of the Spirit is to act on them when they come. And, of course, we need to work very hard to be sure that we are listening to the promptings of the true Spirit and not just justifying our own wishes or listening to the minions of the adversary.

Fourth, Elder Eyring stated his opinion that the most important choice teachers and students can make is to invite the Spirit to testify of the Savior and His Restoration of His true Church through His prophet Joseph Smith. Why would this be so important? I would suggest that having a regular spiritual confirma-

tion of foundational principles and premises will familiarize us with the reality of spiritual promptings and also give us a vital standard by which we can measure other inspiration that may come. By being absolutely loyal and secure in the basics, we are better equipped to deal with the vagaries and vicissitudes that all of us will encounter. It is both helpful and healthy to be able to say, as did Nephi, “I know that he [meaning God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17).

In addition to the expectations expressed by Elder Eyring that I have mentioned briefly, let me mention one more that needs to be raised with you. You have been among the most fortunate and blessed of all students, even in this day and age. One of the most difficult tasks I share with my associates in the administration is trying to explain to those who would very much like to come to BYU why this is not always possible. You are a select and often envied group. And yet much of the substance of the support for your first-class education has come from faithful members of the Church all around the world. Their tithing and the additional funds faithfully contributed by special university friends and supporters have helped make you beneficiaries of what we call the BYU experience. I hope that you will never forget those who have sacrificed and contributed in your behalf. Of course you will always be grateful to parents, spouses, other family members, and friends who have helped you directly. Please do not forget those you don’t know and likely will never meet who, because of their love of the Lord and their responsiveness to His servants, pay their tithes and offerings. You are in their debt.

We hope also that you will never forget your teachers, your classmates, and the many devoted and capable people in the BYU community who have contributed to your success and opportunities. We promise we will never forget you and expect that you will not forget

BYU. You will demonstrate your great love for this institution and all that it represents by the way you live your life. You will live in such a way that objective observers will be able to tell that you are different—in a very positive way. They will usually not know exactly how or why, but they will appreciate the goodness and example of your life.

We also hope and expect that you will join the ever-increasing throng of generous alumni and friends who financially contribute to BYU as your circumstances permit. Most will not be able to do much soon, but the habit of contributing regularly, at least yearly, will grow—as will your capacity. You will then be able to demonstrate in a very tangible way that you have caught the vision of what BYU is and what it has done for you.

Know again of our gratitude for you and your accomplishments. It is a great privilege to be part of the wonderful BYU community, and we hope that you will visit regularly and keep in touch with the university.

I have a witness that all President Hinckley has said about BYU is absolutely true. I want you to know that I also testify of the vision and the correctness concerning the potential of Brigham Young University seen by Brigham Young himself. In his lifetime, what we enjoy today seemed at best to be remote if not impossible.

God's hand is on this great university and will be on all associated with it when they live to so qualify. I testify of this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.