

Brigham Young University

Speeches

Measuring Up to the Mission

W. ROLFE KERR

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Measuring Up to the Mission

W. ROLFE KERR

It is truly an honor and a privilege to be with you today. I am especially pleased to have the opportunity to address you graduates. You have my commendation and congratulations as you graduate from this very unique and choice university.

I did not have the privilege of attending Brigham Young University as a student, but I was privileged to serve here in the administration for a time. My wife and I were richly blessed by that experience and cherish the years we enjoyed so much here. We are pleased that several members of our family are graduates of BYU. In fact, a son-in-law is among you graduates today. He is receiving his PhD degree.

In President Samuelson's comments today, nearly all of us were recognized and applauded for whatever we have done and for whomever we represent, but there is one group that I feel deserves additional and particular recognition. Many of you graduates have been assisted, sustained, and supported by a devoted, persistent, and patient spouse. Without this encouragement and sacrifice, the graduation goal you are celebrating today most likely would not have been achieved. Could we ask the wives or husbands of the married

graduates to stand and receive one more expression of appreciation?

I feel this rather keenly—being aware of my daughter's sacrifice in her husband's pursuit of his PhD degree—but I also remember well my own wife's sacrifice as I engaged in that same pursuit. Thanks to you all.

Several years ago President Gordon B. Hinckley was here in this building to address a large fireside gathering. He made reference to his own university graduation, saying:

It dawned on me the other day that I was part of a graduating class of a sister institution in 1932. This coming June it will be sixty years ago that we proudly and happily marched in a processional, listened to a commencement address of which I remember absolutely nothing, and went out to face the world. ["This I Believe" (1 March 1992), BYU 1991–92 Devotional and Fireside Speeches (Provo: BYU, 1992), 75]

W. Rolfe Kerr was commissioner of the Church Educational System and a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this commencement address was given on 17 August 2006.

You have marched—we hope proudly and happily—in a processional and are about to listen to a commencement address of which you will remember absolutely nothing. And, just like President Hinckley and his fellow graduates, you are about to go out to face the world. How well prepared are you for the reality that awaits you? Have you equipped yourselves to succeed in every aspect of your lives—at home, in the Church, in the workplace, and in the communities where you will live?

I hope each of you has gained all that you expected from your BYU experience. I hope you have gained all that your parents and spouses expected. And I hope you have gained all that BYU has expected of you as students and graduates of this university. Your expectations should have been far greater than that which I overheard one graduate express. She said, “I got what I came for—a wonderful husband.”

Now there is nothing wrong with that—and, indeed, much right—but I hope that her expectations also included receiving an education of the highest quality. Each of you should have come to BYU with the expectation that you would receive an education that would equip you with the sacred and secular learning to sustain you spiritually and temporally through the future opportunities and challenges of life.

President Brigham Young, for whom this institution is named, once offered a very insightful definition of educational outcomes. He said, “Education is the power to think clearly, the power to act well in the world’s work, and the power to appreciate life” (quoted by George H. Brimhall in “The Brigham Young University,” *Improvement Era* 23, no. 9 [July 1920]: 831). This is a wonderful description of what you should have acquired through your BYU experience. As you graduate today, I hope your BYU education has empowered you to think clearly, prepared you to obtain meaningful and pro-

ductive employment in the world of work, and enhanced your ability to appreciate the opportunities and beauties of life. I hope that you have learned how to learn, that you love learning, and that you will continue to seek learning by study and also by faith the rest of your lives.

During this past school year BYU completed an accreditation review conducted by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. Such a review typically occurs periodically to ensure the viability of every aspect of a college or university’s operations. BYU produced a comprehensive self-study as part of this accreditation process. Among the purposes of such an accreditation review and the related self-study is the invitation to explore, to update if necessary, and to clearly state the mission of the university. It also provides an opportunity to make judgments as to whether or not the institution is successfully accomplishing its mission.

The mission statement of Brigham Young University declares that “students at BYU should be taught the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” “receive a broad university education,” and “receive instruction in the special fields of their choice.” “Scholarly research and creative endeavor among both faculty and students” are also affirmed as essential to the university’s mission (*The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* [Provo: BYU, 1996], 1–2).

The mission of BYU is further explained in a statement of institutional objectives.

First, the university intends to “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.”

Second, the university intends to “advance truth and knowledge to enhance the education of students, enrich the quality of life, and contribute to a resolution of world problems.”

Third, the university intends to “extend the blessings of learning to members of the Church in all parts of the world.”

Fourth, the university intends to “develop friends for the university and the Church.” (In Merrill J. Bateman, “From Pioneer Roots to a World-Class, Worldwide Institution” [BYU Annual University Conference, 23 August 1999], 8–12, and “Gathered in the Tops of the Mountains” [7 September 1999], *BYU 1999–2000 Speeches* [Provo: BYU, 2000], 8–10; see also Brigham Young University Accreditation Self-Study 2006, 1.2.)

These statements of mission and institutional objectives are expressions of the university’s expectations of itself. In a way, they are also expressions of the university’s expectations of you as graduates, because, indeed, you become a major part of the fulfillment of the vision inspired leaders have for this university. In very significant ways the university must measure itself and its accomplishments through you.

From the results of the recent accreditation review and from all that I have come to know about Brigham Young University, I can state with confidence that as an institution BYU is measuring up to its mission. However, the key question for today is this: How well have you graduates measured up to the mission of BYU? Measuring up to the mission of this special university is a sacred obligation that you cannot ignore. You do not have the luxury of walking off this campus, driving out of Provo, and just simply turning your backs and leaving all this behind.

Speaking to students on this campus in 1996, President Gordon B. Hinckley said:

If this university meets the purpose for which it is maintained, then you must leave here not alone with secular knowledge but, even more important, with a spiritual and moral foundation that will find expression to improve the family, the community, the nation, even the world of which you will be

a part. [“Stand Up for Truth” (17 September 1996), *BYU 1996–97 Speeches* (Provo: BYU, 1997), 23]

Your education has been substantially subsidized by sacred funds made available through the tithes and offerings of faithful Latter-day Saints around the world. We hope that you have been true to this sacred trust as students, but we plead with you to be conscientiously true to this trust by measuring up to the mission of Brigham Young University as alumni throughout the balance of your lives.

This university was established under the influence of divine inspiration and revelation. Its board of trustees is made up of prophets, seers, and revelators and other General Authorities and general officers of the Church. As you know, President Samuelson is a marvelously able leader and administrator who also serves as a General Authority of the Church. He and an equally able administrative team and an exceptional faculty are deeply committed to the success of every student who enrolls at BYU. The members of the board of trustees, the administration, and the faculty feel a great sense of accountability for the results and outcomes of all that transpires here at BYU, but an equally great sense of accountability must be felt by every student. You are, and continue to be, responsible and accountable for the outcomes of your own education.

The Lord instructed the Prophet Joseph Smith on the principle of accountability:

For it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures. [D&C 104:13]

The Lord also said:

For it is required of the Lord, at the hand of every steward, to render an account of his stewardship, both in time and in eternity.

For he who is faithful and wise in time is accounted worthy to inherit the mansions prepared for him of my Father. [D&C 72:3–4]

The university has rendered a current accounting of its stewardship “in time” through the recent accreditation process. The accounting of the university’s stewardship “in eternity,” however, will most likely be rendered through you, through your lives, through your achievements, and, most especially, through your faithfulness. BYU has received a renewal and extension of its accreditation status, and after several years there will be another opportunity to render an account of its stewardship “in time.” Your university is being held accountable for the learning environment and learning outcomes expressed through the lives of its students. The university cannot force you to learn, but it must provide an environment conducive to the best possible student learning outcomes. However, the responsibility for the ultimate outcomes is yours.

The board of trustees has great confidence in the university’s commitment and capacity to provide the most desirable learning environment possible. The trustees have a keen interest in the degree to which the university measures up to its prescribed mission. The trustees are also keenly interested in how well you as graduates measure up to the mission of BYU.

Have you become students of faith, intellect, and character? Have you acquired increased knowledge and deepened testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ? Have you acquired the knowledge and competence necessary to contribute to your chosen professions and to serve your families and the communities where you will live? Have both your mind and your spirit been educated? Are you prepared to make your contribution, no matter how great or small, to the resolution of world problems?

How well you measure up to this mission constitutes the bottom line of your steward-

ship accountability. How well you fare in daily life as followers of Christ; people of faith and character; contributing members of families, the Church, and society; and honest and productive workers in the world’s occupations and professions will be the measure of your accountability and the measure of the university’s ultimate accountability both “in time” and “in eternity.”

When President Samuelson was inaugurated as president of BYU, President Hinckley challenged him and his associates in the faculty and administration to make BYU the best it can be (see Cecil O. Samuelson, “A More Excellent Way: A Changing BYU in a Changing World [BYU Annual University Conference, 24 August 2004], and “The BYU Way” [BYU Annual University Conference, 23 August 2005]). BYU has this stewardship to be the best it can be in providing you with the education, knowledge, values, and tools necessary to be successful and effective in life. You, as individual graduates of this institution, have the responsibility to be the best you can be, to be wise and faithful stewards over that which you have received. You have been given much. You have “entered to learn.” You must now “go forth to serve.” Go forth with honor, go forth with integrity, go forth with a great sense of personal responsibility.

You have now joined the ranks of BYU graduates around the world. You have worked hard, paid your dues, and paid your tuition. However, in October 1992 general conference, President Boyd K. Packer told us that there is a second tuition also due:

*For those privileged to attend a Church school, there is a tuition other than money which we must require of you—a tuition of conduct and performance. Students who enroll in Church schools . . . must commit to a standard of conduct consistent with faithful Church membership. [“To Be Learned Is Good If . . .,” *Ensign*, November 1992, 72]*

I trust that this will be a lifelong commitment that will continue to bless your lives and strengthen those around you.

As graduates you may think you have completed your last final exams. I must remind you, however, that one final examination remains for us all. In ancient days, the Apostle John foresaw that final day of reckoning:

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.
[Revelations 20:12]

This will be a comprehensive final exam, and it will include an ultimate accounting of our personal stewardships—what we have learned, what we have done with what we have learned, and who and what we have become.

In President Hinckley's 1992 fireside address, to which I referred earlier, he said:

Every one of us is largely the product of his or her beliefs. Our behavior is governed by these. They become our standards of conduct. ["This I Believe," 76]

This statement by President Hinckley is consistent with King Benjamin's admonition challenging his people to live according to that which they believed. After teaching them all these principles and having the assurance that the people believed them, he said: "And now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them" (Mosiah 4:10).

I have confidence that you will do that which you believe, and I have confidence that you will become that which you desire to be and that which this university foresees for you. I have confidence in Brigham Young University, and I have confidence in you graduates. I have confidence that you have indeed measured up to the mission of Brigham Young University and that you will continue to do so throughout your lives. I pray for heaven's blessings to be with you to this end, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

