

# *The Great Value of Your Boundless Choice*

J. CRAIG McILROY

**I**t is my great pleasure to congratulate you today on your fine academic achievements. Some of you may in your minds be checking off a box today, feeling you have arrived at a great destination. Others of you may feel you are coming away with more questions than when you started this process. Like some of my children in their twenties, you may feel as if you are drowning in a sea of possibilities, trying to sort out the direction you want to go and deciding which dreams, aspirations, careers, and professions you want to chase.

For a moment let me give you the flip side of that coin. In 1970 I was able to visit the city of Prague. On one street there were lines of people anxiously waiting for bread outside a bakery that had nothing on its shelves. The week before we arrived in Prague, a young college student had in frustration poured gasoline on himself in the center of Wenceslas Square and lit a match. As I gazed down at that burned spot on the ground, I sensed a terrible feeling of desperation and oppression. Those feelings gradually gave way to a rush of intense gratitude for the free land in which I was born and where I lived. I felt as if I was one of the luckiest people on earth. Indeed, today, each of us is.

By contrast to Prague in the 1970s, we live in a country of vast possibilities. It is the promised land of opportunity where the sky's the limit. So what are the possibilities?

During the Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine became the voice rallying the newborn American spirit. His words filled the minds of the new patriots and were on the lips of many. He taught that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we gain too cheaply we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value.

Whatever career or professional path you may choose, I would have you preserve balance in your life. At a time when information pours over us like waves, it is easy to let our lives fall out of balance—with very disappointing results.

Bob Dunwoody, a business consultant, says that first we must have integrity, then technical competence, and, finally, the ability to add value to our business relationships. He suggests we succeed by slowing down, focusing on our personal relationships, and entertaining

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*J. Craig McIlroy was president of the BYU Alumni Association when this commencement address was given on 16 August 2007.*

the possibility that something new might work. In Bob's words: "Sounds crazy, might work!"

Perhaps most intriguing is that while he is describing success in business, to me he is really using gospel principles to define success in business and life. Whatever your age, he suggests retiring right now. He believes in asking and listening rather than knowing and telling. According to Bob, only successful people fail, and if you want something, you must give it away.

President Hinckley has told us that much of what happens in life is a matter of attitude. Netted out, choice becomes a very good thing. The lack of choice has the potential of becoming oppression. I hope you have wisdom beyond your years to appreciate the great value of your boundless choice, the lack of which prompted a young Czechoslovakian student to publicly end his life in a most brutal manner.

As President Samuelson mentioned, on June 23 the Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center was dedicated. We are very excited about this new home for our alumni and a facility that now becomes our new gateway to campus. I encourage you to get involved with your alumni association wherever you may live. Serving others takes our minds off our troubles, gives us a better

perspective on life as we know it, and helps us keep our balance.

In addition to having a great educational experience, I hope you have been touched by the Spirit of the Y. Speaking of the BYU experience, President Hinckley said:

*It has or will become a part of you. . . . It should—it must—leave an everlasting impression upon you. . . . It should become an inseparable part of your very nature. . . .*

*. . . Cultivate it in your lives and hold its very essence until you grow old and gray.* [Gordon B. Hinckley, "The BYU Experience," BYU devotional address, 4 November 1997]

As the 90th president of your alumni association, I hereby confer on each of you lifetime membership in the Brigham Young University Alumni Association. I congratulate you on your fine achievements and welcome you most warmly into this association of nearly 360,000.

I wish you every success and hope your wildest and fondest dreams come true. Clearly you are the hope of our nation, our church, and your families. May you be successful in the things that matter most in this life and in the life to come, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.