

Learning to Love Learning

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My beloved brothers and sisters, I rejoice with you on this special day. Sister Bednar and I have loved watching you happy graduates and grateful family members celebrate a truly important accomplishment. Cameras are clicking, recorders are running, text messages are flying, and smiles are beaming all over this campus. Tonight and tomorrow convocations will convene, festive meals will be enjoyed, and plans for the future will be discussed. This is a day both for remembering and for making memories.

I recall with fondness the day I graduated from Brigham Young University with my undergraduate degree. Susan and I were just a few days away from the birth of our first child, I was about to begin work on a master's degree, we were really poor, and together we looked forward with anticipation to the opportunities and challenges of the future. That graduation day for us marked a beginning rather than a conclusion. And as Sister Bednar and I review our lives and look back on that important day, we recognize and acknowledge the guiding hand and tender mercies of the Lord.

Over the course of my life, I have participated in commencement ceremonies as a student, as a parent, as a professor, as a univer-

sity president, as a friend, and as a spectator. I frankly cannot recall precisely how many commencements I have attended, but it is a very large number. And I readily admit that I genuinely enjoy commencement day on a university campus.

My experience in commencement ceremonies has taught me a valuable lesson: graduates and their families care little about and rarely remember anything a commencement speaker says. I certainly believe that truth applies here today.

My graduation gift to you is a shorter-than-you-expect commencement message that focuses upon the principle of learning to love learning. I want to briefly discuss the importance of learning to love learning in three aspects of our lives. Learning to love learning is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ, is vital to our ongoing spiritual and personal development, and is an absolute necessity in the world in which we do now and will yet live, serve, and work.

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1. Learning to Love Learning Is Central to the Gospel of Jesus Christ

The overarching purpose of Heavenly Father's great plan of happiness is to provide His spirit children with opportunities to learn. The Atonement of Jesus Christ and the agency afforded to all of the Father's children through His infinite and eternal sacrifice are divinely designed to facilitate our learning. The Savior said, "Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me" (D&C 19:23).

We are assisted in learning of and listening to the words of Christ by the Holy Ghost, even the third member of the Godhead. The Holy Ghost reveals and witnesses the truth of all things and brings all things to our remembrance (see John 14:26, 16:13; Moroni 10:5; D&C 39:6). The Holy Ghost is the teacher who kindles within us an abiding love of and for learning.

We repeatedly are admonished in the revelations to ask in faith when we lack knowledge (see James 1:5–6), to "seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118), and to inquire of God that we might receive instruction from His Spirit (see D&C 6:14) and "know mysteries which are great and marvelous" (D&C 6:11). The restored Church of Jesus Christ exists today to help individuals and families learn about and receive the blessings of the Savior's gospel.

A hierarchy of importance exists among the things you and I can learn. Indeed, all learning is not equally important. The Apostle Paul taught this truth in his second epistle to Timothy as he warned that in the latter days many people would be "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).

Some facts are helpful or interesting to know. Some knowledge is useful to learn and apply. But gospel truths are essential for us to understand and live if we are to become what our Heavenly Father yearns for us to become.

The type of learning I am attempting to describe is not merely the accumulation of data and facts and frameworks; rather, it is acquiring and applying knowledge for righteousness.

The revelations teach us that "the glory of God is intelligence" (D&C 93:36). We typically may think the word *intelligence* in this scripture denotes innate cognitive ability or a particular gift for academic work. In this verse, however, one of the meanings of *intelligence* is the application of the knowledge we obtain for righteous purposes. As President David O. McKay taught, the learning "for which the Church stands . . . is the application of knowledge to the development of a noble and Godlike character" (David O. McKay, "True Education," *Improvement Era*, March 1957, 141).

You and I are here upon the earth to prepare for eternity, to learn how to learn, to learn things that are temporally important and eternally essential, and to assist others in learning wisdom and truth (see D&C 97:1). Understanding who we are, where we came from, and why we are upon the earth places upon each of us a great responsibility both to learn how to learn and to learn to love learning.

2. Learning to Love Learning Is Vital to Our Ongoing Spiritual and Personal Development

Brigham Young, the man for whom this university appropriately is named, was a learner. Although President Young had only 11 days of formal schooling, he understood the need for learning both the wisdom of God and the things of the world. He was a furniture maker, a missionary, a colonizer, a governor, and the Lord's prophet.

I marvel at both the way Brigham Young learned and how much he learned. He never ceased learning from the revelations of the Lord, from the scriptures, and from good books. Perhaps President Young was such a consummate learner precisely because he was not constrained unduly by the arbitrary

boundaries so often imposed through the structures and processes of formal education. He clearly learned to love learning. He clearly learned how to learn. He ultimately became a powerful disciple and teacher precisely because he first was an effective learner.

President Brigham Young repeatedly taught that “the object of [our mortal] existence is to learn” (*JD* 9:167). The following statements by President Young emphasize this truth:

Statement 1. “The religion embraced by the Latter-day Saints, if only slightly understood, prompts them to search diligently after knowledge. There is no other people in existence more eager to see, hear, learn, and understand truth” (*JD* 8:6).

Statement 2. “Put forth your ability to learn as fast as you can, and gather all the strength of mind and principle of faith you possibly can, and then distribute your knowledge to the people” (*JD* 8:146).

Statement 3. “This work is a progressive work, this doctrine that is taught the Latter-day Saints in its nature is exalting, increasing, expanding and extending broader and broader until we can know as we are known, see as we are seen” (*JD* 16:165).

Statement 4. “We are in the school [of mortality] and keep learning, and we do not expect to cease learning while we live on earth; and when we pass through the veil, we expect still to continue to learn and increase our fund of information. That may appear a strange idea to some; but it is for the plain and simple reason that we are not capacitated to receive all knowledge at once. We must therefore receive a little here and a little there” (*JD* 6:286).

Statement 5. “We might ask, when shall we cease to learn? I will give you my opinion about it: never, never” (*JD* 3:203).

Brigham Young’s acceptance of and conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ fueled his unceasing curiosity and love of learning. The

ongoing spiritual and personal development evidenced in the life of Brigham Young is a worthy example for you and for me.

3. Learning to Love Learning Is an Absolute Necessity in the World in Which We Do Now and Will Yet Live, Serve, and Work

Many of you already have posed for graduation pictures with family and friends by the landmark sign located at the entrance to this campus on which the following motto is found: “Enter to learn; go forth to serve.” This expression certainly does not imply that everything necessary for a lifetime of meaningful service can or will be obtained during a few short years on this campus. Rather, the spirit of this statement is that students come to receive foundational instruction about learning how to learn and learning to love learning. Furthermore, your desire and capacity to serve have not been “put on hold” during your years of intellectual exploration and development on this campus. As students you have served in many and meaningful ways. Thus, you entered both to learn and to serve.

May I respectfully suggest an addition to this well-known motto that is too long to put on the sign but important for us to remember: “Enter to learn to love learning and serving; go forth to continue learning and serving.” Truly you entered Brigham Young University to learn to love learning and serving. As you now depart from this campus to pursue family, educational, and career opportunities, you are going forth to continue both learning and serving.

Today as we bask in the satisfaction of worthy accomplishment, each of us certainly realizes that academic assignments, test scores, and a cumulative GPA have not produced a final and polished product. Rather, you have only started to put in place a foundation of learning upon which you can build forever. Much of the data and knowledge obtained through a specific major or program of study

may rapidly become outdated and obsolete. The particular topics investigated and learned are not nearly as important as what has been learned about learning. As we press forward in life—spiritually, interpersonally, and professionally—no book of answers is readily available with guidelines and solutions to the great challenges of life. All we have is our capacity to learn and our love of and for learning.

I believe a basic test exists of our capacity to learn and the measure of our love of learning. Here is the test: When you and I do not know what to do or how to proceed to achieve a particular outcome—when we are confronted with a problem that has no clear answer and no prescribed pattern for resolution—how do we learn what to do?

This was precisely the situation in which Nephi found himself as he was commanded to build a ship. “And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Thou shalt construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across these waters” (1 Nephi 17:8).

Nephi was not a sailor. He had been reared in Jerusalem, an inland city, rather than along the borders of the Mediterranean Sea. It seems unlikely that he knew much about or had experience with the tools and skills necessary to build a ship. He may not have ever previously seen an oceangoing vessel. In essence, then, Nephi was commanded and instructed to build something he had never built before in order to go someplace he had never been before.

Now I doubt any of us will be commanded to build a ship as was Nephi, but each of us will have our spiritual and learning capabilities tested over and over and over again. The ever-accelerating rate of change in our modern world will force us into uncharted territory and demanding circumstances.

For example, the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that today’s graduates will have between 10 and 14 different jobs—by the time

they are 38 years old. And the necessary skills to perform successfully in each job assignment will constantly change and evolve.

For much of my career as a professor, there was no Internet, no Google, no Wikipedia, no YouTube, and no TelePresence. The Internet only began to be widely used by the general public in the mid-1990s. Prior to that time, no courses were taught about and no majors were offered in Internet-related subjects. I remember teaching myself HTML and experimenting with ways student learning could be enhanced through this new and emerging technology. In contrast, most of you have never known and cannot imagine a world without the Internet and its associated technologies. I know I am revealing my advanced age, but the change from my “no Internet world” to your “Internet only world” has occurred within the last 15 years. Can we even begin to imagine how much things will continue to change during the next 15 years?

Because vast amounts of information are so readily available and sophisticated technologies make possible widespread and even global collaboration, we may be prone to put our trust in “the arm of flesh” (2 Nephi 4:34; see also 28:31) as we grapple with complex challenges and problems. We perhaps might be inclined to rely primarily upon our individual and collective capacity to reason, to innovate, to plan, and to execute. Certainly we must use our God-given abilities to the fullest, employ our best efforts, and exercise appropriate judgment as we encounter the opportunities of life. But our mortal best is never enough.

President Brigham Young testified that we are never left alone or on our own:

My knowledge is, if you will follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, as recorded in the New Testament, every man and woman will be put in possession of the Holy Ghost. . . . They will know things that are, that will be, and that have been. They will understand things in heaven, things

on the earth, and things under the earth, things of time, and things of eternity, according to their several callings and capacities. [JD 1:243]

I congratulate you on this special day. I pray you have been blessed with a deep and enduring love of learning. Learning to love learning equips us for an ever-changing and unpredictable future. Knowing how to learn prepares us to discern and act upon opportunities that others may not readily recognize. I am confident you will pass the test of learning what to do when you do not know what to do or how to proceed.

As our sons left home to attend college, to serve as missionaries, and to pursue their personal and professional dreams, Sister Bednar and I shared with them the following counsel:

- Remember that you represent the Savior.
- Remember that you represent your family.
- Remember that you represent The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

And as you now graduate from BYU, let me add one more item to the list:

- Remember that you represent Brigham Young University.

Today you become alumni of Brigham Young University and have the responsibility to help the world better understand who we are and what we do at this remarkable institution. How you live, what you do, and what you become ultimately define this university. May the Lord bless you as you always remember Him and serve Him with faith and diligence.

I witness the living reality of God the Eternal Father, of our Savior and Redeemer, even the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost. I also declare my witness that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth in these latter days.

I pray your love of learning will grow ever deeper, ever richer, and ever more complete, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.