

# *A Standard for the Nations*

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## **Introduction**

Brothers and sisters, I am honored to be with you today. I congratulate each of you graduates for your hard work and persistence in meeting the standard for a highly regarded diploma from BYU.

This is an outstanding university in a beautiful setting. When I was a new missionary training not far from here, I was awestruck by the brilliant sunrises above this campus. I wrote to my family that I had never seen more beautiful sunrises in my life. My father responded, “Son, we also have beautiful sunrises here at home, but you weren’t up early enough to see them!”

Perhaps there are times we don’t see the beauty around us or fully appreciate the blessings in our lives.

## **Arise and Shine Forth**

As a graduate of this university, you truly are blessed and privileged. May I remind you that where “much is given much is required” (D&C 82:3).

The Lord said:

*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

*Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. [Matthew 5:14–16]*

The Church recently published an updated version of the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth*. It is a valuable resource to help all of us understand and live important gospel standards. On the back cover are these words from the Doctrine and Covenants: “Verily I say unto you all: Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations” (D&C 115:5).

Each of you, who have been given so much, has a duty to shine. To do this you must shun the ungodly influences in the world and maintain high standards. The path of mediocrity can never be yours. To be seen as a standard, your life must be one of distinction and excellence. It must be filled with good works that inspire others to seek God and to live Christlike lives.

At a BYU devotional last year President Thomas S. Monson said: “May we always be known as followers of Christ and, as such, become ‘as lights in the world.’ . . . Just think how much good can

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*David L. Beck was the Young Men general president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this commencement address was given on 9 August 2012.*

come to the world from our collective lights as we allow the gospel to radiate through us” (“Be a Light to the World,” BYU devotional address, 1 November 2011).

### **Principled Lives of Goodness**

There are many BYU graduates whose principled lives of goodness and distinction shine as a standard for you and the nations.

#### ***Blessing Nations—Wilford A. Cardon***

Many years after graduating from BYU, Wilford A. Cardon served as a young mission president in Brazil, where he saw a great need for higher education among the Brazilian people. When he returned home from his mission, he was determined to help students in Brazil and other developing countries around the world.

He started a sponsorship program at BYU to provide graduate management education for these students. He wanted to prepare participants for leadership roles in their chosen professions, in their communities, and in the Church when they returned to their native countries.

To date, 252 students from forty-five countries have participated in the program. In addition to successful careers, many have held responsible Church leadership positions in their native countries. Three of them now serve as General Authorities. Others have served as Area Seventies, mission presidents, and stake presidents.

Wilford Cardon has set a standard of generosity that is literally blessing nations.

#### ***A Christ-Centered Life—Stephen R. Covey***

The late Stephen R. Covey is another BYU graduate whose life and service have been a standard for the nations. Here are some excerpts from his obituary:

*In 1983, he [started] an organization . . . with the mission of taking principle-centered leadership to the world. This mission influenced him . . . to personally deliver thousands of speeches to individuals, leaders, CEOs, generals, and heads of state from all around the globe and to write dozens of books which have sold*

*millions of copies in numerous languages. He thereby influenced literally tens of millions of people and thousands of organizations and communities everywhere. He was always surprised and embarrassed by his professional success and simply saw himself as a steward of the great work he was doing, always giving credit to God.*

*. . . He loved gathering his family and holding family councils and firesides where he would teach us important lessons such as how to make Christ the center of our lives or how to better serve Mom so that we “don’t kill her off.” [“Stephen Richards Covey,” obituary, *Deseret News*, 19–21 July 2012; [legacy.com/obituaries/deseretnews/obituary.aspx?pid=158620708#fb](http://legacy.com/obituaries/deseretnews/obituary.aspx?pid=158620708#fb)]*

Stephen Covey lived a Christ-centered life. He humbly sought light and knowledge and God’s will through daily prayer and scripture study. He had a keen sense of the mission God had for him to perform, and he was true to that mission. Because of that, people everywhere were attracted to the light that radiated from him. He demonstrated the credibility and persuasive power one has when his personal standard is a Christ-centered life.

#### ***A City on a Hill—The BYU Accounting Program***

The nationally acclaimed BYU accounting program has set an extraordinary standard of excellence. In describing the faculty of the School of Accountancy, the school’s director, Steve Glover, said, “We believe our cohesiveness and common purpose stem from the knowledge that we are building character and the kingdom as well as teaching accounting.”

What are the results when the common purpose of a faculty includes building character?

The chairman and CEO of one of the big four accounting firms—a man not of our faith—answered that question when he shared with me the following:

*Year in and year out, BYU is one of the top-rated accounting and business programs in the country. It has been one of [our firm’s] top schools in terms of interns and graduates that we employ. It is not a*

*coincidence. We find the values of the BYU students in wonderful alignment with our values and the students much better developed than students at many other universities. We find the students at BYU to be more mature in their thought processes and just more mature overall. And we find that the students from BYU are much more globally aware than peers at other schools. The training at the school, the teachings of the Church, and the mission experiences all undoubtedly play a big role in these differences.*

The BYU accounting program and its graduates today are like a shining city on the hill—a standard that cannot be attained merely with academic or technical skills. It requires character.

#### ***In Our Homes—Susan B. Stapley***

There is no more important place for you to seek a Christlike standard of behavior than in your own home. You must never sacrifice your family for career or other outside interests. Indeed, in time and eternity you will influence nations by being family focused.

In this regard I cannot help but think of my dear sister, Susan B. Stapley. When she graduated from BYU with a degree in French, she was uncertain about how she wanted to use her degree. She was also concerned that she was not married.

Eventually she did meet a wonderful man, Michael Stapley, and they married. Children and heavy Church assignments for her husband came early in their marriage.

Susan poured her talent and energy into the demanding, challenging work of raising her children. At the same time, she was fully supportive of her husband in his work and Church callings. Together they raised eight outstanding children. Their sons and daughters have served missions in seven nations in Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

Today my sister is serving with her husband as he presides over a mission in Argentina. By the time they complete their mission, they will have led and loved some 570 missionaries from eighteen nations.

This extraordinarily bright and talented sister, wife, and mother is—among other things—gifted

musically and speaks four languages. Yet there were occasions when the overwhelming demands of raising a family led her to question how much good she was doing. At times the loud voices of the world drowned out the still, small voice that whispered that her job was important. Sometimes there were even other voices, such as the one that said, “Mom, don’t you ever feel bad that you went to all the work of getting a college degree and then didn’t do anything with your life?” Twenty years later that same voice is saying, “Mom, how did you ever manage to do it all?” Today it would be impossible to overstate the influence she has had and will have. As President Harold B. Lee taught, “The most important part of the Lord’s work that you will do, is the work that you do within the walls of your own home” (“Doing the Right Things for the Right Reasons,” BYU address, 19 April 1961, 5).

#### ***No Matter What, Give of Yourself—Amanda de Lange***

When disappointments come into your life—and they will—you have an important decision to make. Do you wallow in self-pity or do you arise and shine forth? As a thirty-five-year-old single woman graduating from BYU, Amanda de Lange chose the latter. (The following is taken from Ann Brenoff and Amy Page Christiansen, “Amanda de Lange: Woman Who Rescued Orphans Shares a Final Message,” *Huffington Post*, 13 July 2012; [huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/13/amanda-de-lange-starfish\\_n\\_1660170.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=religion&ir=Religion](http://huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/13/amanda-de-lange-starfish_n_1660170.html?utm_hp_ref=religion&ir=Religion).)

After graduation Amanda went to Taiwan to teach English, then on to Xi’an, China, where she continued teaching and started volunteering at the city orphanage. She wanted to do even more, so the orphanage decided to let her care for babies with special medical needs. Just four days later, with the legal papers signed, she went to the orphanage and picked out six babies and took them home. Her Starfish foster home had begun.

“She laughed at her own ambition,” recalled a friend. “A single lady taking care of six malnourished babies, some needing to be fed with a dropper, all on her own.”

In an article highlighting Amanda's life, journalist Ann Brenoff described how Starfish blossomed:

*Amanda knew she couldn't stop at just six, so she hired some help, and from there [her foster home] just grew and grew. . . . At one point, Amanda operated her orphanage out of three large apartments—housing up to 50 babies, with 26 nannies and volunteers coming and going all the time.*

In all, she cared for 168 foster kids with medical needs that required nearly 250 surgeries. Eighty-one of those children ended up being adopted into families all over the world.

*Amanda took the sickest babies from Chinese orphanages and brought them back to life. She fed them, held them, nurtured them. She convinced the world's top doctors and surgeons to come [heal] them, to restore them, to fix their damaged hearts and cleft palates. And then she saved them again by creating a new, temporary family for them—a small army of devoted volunteers who comforted the babies through their nightmares, soothed them when they [suffered], taught them how to love and be loved. She then helped her Starfish babies find [loving] families. She saved them, loved them and then sent them on their way—pure and simple [though] never easy. . . .*

*[One mother says she] will always remember what Amanda said to her on the day she came to Starfish to pick up her son. It was, "I know my place. I am to love them, nurture them and care for them. I am to then give them up so that they may experience the love of a family."*

Early this year Amanda was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of cancer. She eventually

ended up in hospice care in Nashville. Starfish families traveled "thousands of miles to see her and say their good-byes, bringing along many of the 81 adopted children who have passed through Starfish's door—[many of whom] wouldn't be alive if not for Amanda."

Twenty-six days ago, on July 14, Amanda de Lange, a shining light, truly a standard for the nations, passed away at age fifty-one.

Five days before she died, in a letter to the Starfish community, she wrote:

*To the babies of Starfish, I want you to know that I have given it my best effort, my all. My life has been to care for and love you. Wherever you go in your lives, I wish you the very best. May you always be drawn to those in need and may you never forget that at a very critical time in your life there was someone there at the door to welcome you into the house. Be the change you want to see in the world.*

#### **A Standard for the Nations**

You may think that these examples I have shared today are so extraordinary that they are beyond your reach—that your influence could never be so dramatic or so far-reaching. If you have these thoughts, I would say to you: Remember who you are and that you have a great purpose here on earth. Do not underestimate the good you can accomplish with the Lord's help. Living a Christ-centered life will inspire and empower you to arise and shine forth in ways you never imagined before. I share my testimony of Jesus Christ. He is the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. He is the light and the life of the world. May your lives reflect His light and shine as a standard for the nations, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.