

Humbly Combining Heart and Mind

LEGRAND R. CURTIS JR.

It is wonderful to be back at BYU today. I was a student here in the early 1970s. During that time, some important things happened here, including the construction of the Marriott Center, the appointment of President Dallin H. Oaks as president of the university, the building of the Provo Temple, and the hiring of LaVell Edwards as head football coach and him taking his team to BYU's first bowl game, the 1974 Fiesta Bowl. During that time, several important things also happened in my life, including receiving my mission call and serving a mission, getting engaged and married, becoming a father, and graduating with a degree in economics. I would like to speak about another important thing that happened to me during my time as a student here.

The Mind and the Heart Together

There is an interesting connection in the scriptures between the heart and the mind. Consider this verse from an early revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith concerning the process of knowledge being revealed:

*Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.*¹

From this verse it is clear that the process of revelation can include both ideas to our minds and feelings to our hearts. In the next section the Lord further described this process:

Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

*But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong.*²

These verses once again speak of the mind as well as feelings that are manifest inside us—in this case, a burning in the bosom. This expression is reminiscent of a passage in Luke 24, when one of the disciples who walked with the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus said to the other disciple

LeGrand R. Curtis Jr., a General Authority Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional on January 16, 2018.

with whom he had shared that experience, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”³

Both passages, whether referring to feelings in the heart or the bosom, are referring to “the workings of the Spirit”⁴ that we can feel within us as part of revelation. The prophet Mormon, in describing the revelation to include the small plates of Nephi with his compiled record, said:

*And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will.*⁵

King Benjamin’s discourse also provides insights into the interaction of the heart and the mind. In the first verse of his sermon, King Benjamin urged his listeners to “open your ears that ye may hear, and your hearts that ye may understand, and your minds that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to your view.”⁶ I find it intriguing that the people were urged to open their hearts to understand. We usually think of understanding as being associated with the brain. One of the lessons of this sermon is that spiritual things are understood with the heart—that is, by the feelings of the Spirit within us. But the brain is not left out of the process. The people of King Benjamin were also urged to open their minds, “that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to [their] view.”⁷ Hence, to learn the things that King Benjamin had to teach that day, the people needed to have both the heart and the mind fully engaged.

One of the important things that happened to me during my days as a student at BYU was that I came to appreciate what can happen as the mind and the heart, or the spirit, work together. It was here that I learned the truth of words quoted by Elder Hugh B. Brown: “Men live best when they neither deny themselves the verdict of the head nor the intimations of the heart, but seek a working harmony of both.”⁸

Learning with the Spirit and the Mind

My appreciation of that principle happened for me in a variety of ways. One place that it happened was in the classes that I took here. During my first semester at BYU, I took a Book of Mormon class from C. Terry Warner, the director of the BYU Honors Program and a philosophy professor. It was a small class, and Brother Warner’s approach was simple. In preparation for each class session, we read some assigned chapters from the Book of Mormon and came to class ready to discuss them. During each class session Brother Warner asked what insights we had had during our reading, and he also shared insights that he had had concerning those chapters. The result was electrifying. The Spirit was very strong as bright minds and willing hearts combined in discussing the teachings and applications of those Book of Mormon chapters. I experienced the inspired learning that takes place as the heart and the mind are both open and engaged, as encouraged by King Benjamin.

That type of learning continued throughout my time at BYU. In my last semester I took a religion class taught by now Elder Bruce C. Hafen. The class was entitled “Your Religious Problems” and was patterned after a class Elder Hafen had taken when he was a student at BYU.⁹ Each student in the class made a presentation with respect to a religious problem of her or his choosing. In addition to discussing the subject as a group, each of us wrote our own brief response with respect to the issue presented. Some of the issues raised were very challenging, and solutions often did not come easily or quickly. Each of us in the class needed open hearts and minds to analyze the issues with faith.

I got to see the process described in Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–9 put into practice as we studied things out in our minds and prayerfully sought the Spirit for confirmation and further direction. I was impressed by the intellects of Elder Hafen and the class members, but what I remember most is the Spirit I felt surrounding what we did in that class. What I experienced in that class, and in other classes at BYU, fits neatly

within this statement penned several years later with respect to the ideal BYU experience: “A spiritually strengthening education warms and enlightens students by the bright fire of their teachers’ faith while enlarging their minds with knowledge.”¹⁰

This combination of spirit and mind was not limited to the classes that I took. There are notes that I took in 1971 of a devotional talk by Elder Neal A. Maxwell, who was not yet a General Authority of the Church at that time. Both his intellect and deep spirituality soared in that talk. While here I also heard or read the words of Truman G. Madsen, Hugh Nibley, President Dallin H. Oaks, Ann Madsen, Rex E. Lee, Robert K. Thomas, Carol Lynn Pearson, Chauncey C. Riddle, and a host of others whose powerful intellects and devotion to the Lord challenged my thinking and showed me how the wonderful principles of the gospel called for my very best thinking and, more important, my very best living.

My association with fellow students did the same. My days at BYU included the blessing of getting to know many students whose commitment to the Lord and serious academic preparation paved the way for their service in the Church, in their families, and in organizations around the country and the world. Following their training, they held important positions at leading universities, businesses, law firms, and other institutions. That service has made the world a better place. But it also blessed me personally to see their powerful combination of mind and spirit. I saw in them what Elder Hafen once referred to as the “healthy relationship between heart and head.”¹¹

The friends of whom I speak embody what is now stated as the aims of a Brigham Young University education: “A BYU education should be (1) spiritually strengthening, (2) intellectually enlarging, and (3) character building, leading to (4) lifelong learning and service.”¹²

Last year Elder Neil L. Andersen eulogized one of our mutual BYU friends, the late Elder Bruce D. Porter, in this way:

*I first met Bruce when we were students at Brigham Young University. He was one of the best and the brightest. After he received his doctoral degree from Harvard University, emphasizing Russian affairs, Bruce’s thinking and writing brought prominence that could have derailed him, but the wealth and praise of the world never clouded his view. His loyalty was to his Savior, Jesus Christ; to his eternal companion, Susan; to his children and grandchildren.*¹³

Similar things could be said of other friends from my BYU days. And I acknowledge that such associations and such intellectual and spiritual experiences can and do happen at other places. I personally treasure my friendships and experiences from my University of Michigan years and from other times in my life.

A Word of Caution

While I rejoice in what can happen as the spirit and the mind are joined in serious study, there is a caution that all of us who love the things of the mind need to take very seriously. In raising this caution, let me start with these words of Jacob from 2 Nephi 9:

*O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.*¹⁴

As we rejoice in the blessing of being able to think and to learn, it is imperative that we never lose our sense of humility before God. In his talk referenced earlier, King Benjamin put all of this in perspective:

*Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend.*¹⁵

The fact that man does not comprehend all that God can comprehend should make us deeply humble before Him and willing to follow His counsel in all things. It should make us anxious to have the Spirit enlighten our minds and enhance our understanding. I think with sadness of a scholarly friend who stopped coming to church because he did not find the discussions in our church meetings to be “interesting.” His focus had moved away from the combination of mind and spirit. Perhaps he had fallen into the trap of which Jacob warned.

One of my memories from BYU is of a lecture that I attended given by Truman Madsen, a BYU philosophy professor. He told of having one of his colleagues, Hugh Nibley, excitedly come to his office with his Book of Mormon in hand and turned to Jacob’s sermon in 2 Nephi 9. Brother Nibley’s focus was on these words from verse 42: “The learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom [God] despiseth.”

Brother Nibley, one of the most learned people ever to teach on this campus, let Brother Madsen know that he was deeply struck by the scriptural message that God despises those “who are puffed up because of their learning.” He marveled at Jacob’s use of the word *despiseth*, and as one who loved learning, he was determined never to be “puffed up” because of that learning. In his writings Brother Nibley said of this statement by Jacob, “That must be the all-time put-down.”¹⁶

The Integration of Sincere Humility

This part of 2 Nephi 9 requires more review because it not only contains that warning but also a way forward for all of us. In verse 41 Jacob taught that Christ is the keeper of the gate to the kingdom of heaven and that there is no other gate. Then comes verse 42, which I quoted in part earlier. Here is the whole verse:

And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth;

and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them.

The way forward is to consider ourselves “fools before God” and to “come down in the depths of humility.” Considering ourselves fools before God is to remember King Benjamin’s teaching referenced earlier that God comprehends everything and that we, at our best, only comprehend a little.¹⁷ That helps us stay in the depths of humility and recognize the need for His wisdom in our lives. With that humility, as lovers of learning, we can rejoice in another verse from this chapter: “But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.”¹⁸

In our efforts to maintain the humility that we must have, we are blessed to have the examples of those who lead us. For the last almost fourteen years it has been my blessing to go on assignments, at various times, as the junior companion to fifteen different apostles, including the three who were introduced today as the new First Presidency of the Church. I have always had deep respect for the senior leaders of this Church. But, after having watched them close up, I must say that they are even better than I thought they were. And one of the ways they are so good is because of the sincere humility that they have.

My first assignment with a member of the Twelve was in 2004 when I was assigned to go to a stake conference with Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin. I nervously picked him up at his home. As we were driving to the stake conference, I tried to tell him how honored I was to be in his company. I said something like, “Elder Wirthlin, I am deeply honored to be with you.”

He responded by saying, “Brother Curtis, I am deeply honored to be with you.”

I thought to myself, “I did not explain that very well.” So I summoned my courage and tried again. “Elder Wirthlin,” I said, “I am just an ordinary member of the Church, and it is an extraordinary experience for someone like me to be with an apostle.”

He responded, “I am also an ordinary member of the Church, and it is extraordinary for me to be

with you.” He seemed not to understand what I was trying to express.

At the conference he acted in every way like an apostle, being mighty in declaring God’s word, but he seemed incapable of seeing anything of significance in himself.

At his funeral his son said this:

When I contemplate the legacy that Dad left his family and the Church, his humility stands out. Dad just never saw himself as anyone special. When President Monson ordained him an Apostle, he prophetically declared to Dad, “Your humility will endear you to the people.” And so it has.¹⁹

Another outstanding example of humility is President Russell M. Nelson, who was presented earlier today as the new president of the Church. His credentials as a scholar and a heart surgeon are extremely impressive. In addition to his medical degree, he also has a PhD from the University of Minnesota, and his medical research greatly expanded the ability of medical science to prolong life through open-heart surgery. He was the first person to perform open-heart surgery in the state of Utah, and Utah was the third state in the nation to have such surgeries performed. During his medical career he received great professional recognition and lectured all over the world. But during that career he was also faithful to the Lord and His Church and took on small and large church callings as they came to him. He served as a stake president, general Sunday School president, and then regional representative while still conducting his research and performing surgeries.

As recounted by Elder Neil L. Andersen at the most recent general conference, during that busy time as a surgeon and Church leader, President Nelson also humbly heeded the invitation of President Spencer W. Kimball and the associated promptings of the Spirit to learn Mandarin Chinese.²⁰ That humility led him to opportunities to form associations with important people in China, bless the people of that land, and benefit the work of the Church.²¹

Another great example of humility is President Henry B. Eyring, another member of our new First

Presidency. President Eyring loves learning, and he excelled as a scholar. He received a PhD from Harvard University and accepted an appointment to be a professor at Stanford University, where he taught business classes and conducted important research. From there he went on to be president of Ricks College, which years later became BYU–Idaho.

While in that position he heard the president of the Church, President Ezra Taft Benson, give a talk in general conference in which he encouraged members to get out of debt, including paying off mortgages. President Eyring’s business knowledge gave him reasons why, given the then current economic conditions, it might not have been a good time to pay off the mortgage that he and his wife had on their house. However, their humility in following the direction of the prophet of God gave them the will to do it. Although they were not sure that they could do it, once they started trying, an opportunity materialized for the Eyrings to sell an asset that had been hard to sell and then to use the proceeds to pay off their mortgage. In the October 2010 general conference, after recounting how that happened, President Eyring said the following:

A person might say that was only a coincidence. But our mortgage was paid off. And our family still listens for any word in a prophet’s message that might be sent to tell what we should do to find the security and peace God wants for us.²²

A study of President Eyring’s life shows that humility exemplified over and over. In his biography, *I Will Lead You Along*, you will find example after example of President Eyring humbly following the counsel of Church leaders. Chapter titles include “Follow the Brethren” and “Hearken unto the Lord’s Servant.” Those whose direction he followed included many senior General Authorities but also stake presidents, bishops, and a home teacher.²³ His life story also shows many instances of him humbly following impressions of the Holy Spirit that came to him.²⁴

I have seen that same humility in President Dallin H. Oaks and in other senior leaders with whom I have served. They are strong and powerful

leaders, but they are also humble and gracious and regularly seek the counsel of those around them. Many of these apostles have advanced degrees from prestigious schools or other significant accomplishments, but those degrees and those accomplishments do not keep them from being humble. To the contrary, they are, just as Alma the Younger was, “humble servant[s] of God.”²⁵

The prime example of humility, of course, is our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He had a place of great preeminence in the pre-earth life. He created this and other worlds. Yet He accepted fully His Father’s plan for our salvation and voluntarily came to this earth to live and minister in the most humble of circumstances. In all that He did, He sought only the glory of the Father and to see the Father’s will done. He resisted every temptation of Satan, including the temptation to receive honor and glory. He committed no sin but humbly accepted the responsibility to suffer the incomparable pain required to pay for the sins of all mankind—including your sins and my sins. He humbly submitted to the will of His Father in doing all that was required so that He could redeem us. He descended below all things so that He could accomplish His remarkable Atonement.

Of Him I bear my witness. From experiences that I have had in my life, including experiences on this campus, I know that He is the Christ, our Redeemer, and that His Atonement is real and effective.

I am grateful for the Spirit that He bestows upon us. I am grateful for the minds and hearts that He has granted unto us and the patience He has with us as we learn grace by grace. I bear testimony of Him and wish you the best in your journey to humbly combine heart and mind in His service. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. D&C 8:2.
2. D&C 9:7–9.
3. Luke 24:32.
4. 2 Nephi 1:6; Jacob 4:15; Words of Mormon 1:7; and Moroni 6:9. See also 1 Nephi 19:20 (“workings in the spirit”).
5. Words of Mormon 1:7.
6. Mosiah 2:9.
7. Mosiah 2:9.
8. Bertha Chapman Cady and Vernon Mosher Cady, *The Way Life Begins: An Introduction to Sex Education* (New York: American Social Hygiene Association, 1917), 4; quoted in Hugh B. Brown, “Browsings in Brief: From the Notebook of President Hugh B. Brown,” *Millennial Star* 100, no. 10 (10 March 1938): 150.
9. See Bruce C. Hafen, in “Bruce C. Hafen: The Mind, the Spirit, the Soul,” *Brigham Young Magazine*, August 1996, 26.
10. The Aims of a BYU Education (1995).
11. Hafen, “The Mind, the Spirit, the Soul,” 30.
12. Aims of a BYU Education.
13. Neil L. Andersen, “Overcoming the World,” *Ensign*, May 2017.
14. 2 Nephi 9:28.
15. Mosiah 4:9.
16. Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989), 509.
17. See Mosiah 4:9.
18. 2 Nephi 9:29.
19. Joseph B. Wirthlin Jr., quoted in funeral tributes, in “Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin: Committed to the Kingdom,” *In Memoriam: A Supplement to the Ensign*, *Ensign*, February 2009.
20. See Neil L. Andersen, “The Voice of the Lord,” *Ensign*, November 2017.
21. See Andersen, “The Voice of the Lord”; see also Spencer J. Condie, “Serving the Chinese,” in *Russell M. Nelson: Father, Surgeon, Apostle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 215–32.
22. Henry B. Eyring, “Trust in God, Then Go and Do,” *Ensign*, November 2010; see also Robert I. Eaton and Henry J. Eyring, *I Will Lead You Along: The Life of Henry B. Eyring* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 252–55.
23. See, generally, Eaton and Eyring, *I Will Lead You Along*, in particular, pages 241–63 and 307–25.
24. See, generally, Eaton and Eyring, *I Will Lead You Along*.
25. Alma 8:19.