

# *The Abundant Life*

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**I**t is an honor to be asked to speak at this devotional. Our family has a real loyalty to Brigham Young University. My husband and I, our five children, and their spouses all graduated from BYU. As our grandchildren approach their college years, we hope they will carry on the BYU tradition.

As I thought about speaking here today, I reflected back on the days when I attended BYU—a half century ago. That makes me sound so old!

I came to BYU from a small high school; there were fewer than sixty of us in our graduating class. I hadn't traveled much. Living on a farm meant there was always work to be done, cows to milk, and water to change, so we didn't get far from home. Coming to BYU was quite an exciting adventure for me. I admit I came a little starry-eyed, with my head full of dreams, as I looked forward to more independence, new friends, and new opportunities to prepare for my future. That is probably why I was a little disappointed when the first boy to ask me out on a date was from my high school. He was also the second one to ask me out—and the third and the fourth.

I became concerned that this hometown boy would begin thinking there was more to our relationship than I thought there was, and I

determined that I needed to talk to him about it. One night as he took me home from a date, I looked for just the right opportunity.

As he took me to the door, and before I could say anything, he said, "I was just wondering if you would like to go steady with me."

It had happened just as I was afraid it would, and I quickly responded, "Oh, no, I can't do that. I didn't come here to BYU to do that. I came here to date lots of guys, have fun, and meet lots of people."

As I went on and on, his eyes got wide, and, finally, when I paused to take a breath, he asked, "What did you think I just asked you?"

A little puzzled, I responded, "You asked me if I would like to go steady with you."

He shook his head and said, "No, I asked if you would like to go study with me—s-t-u-d-y. Study."

Needless to say, he never asked me out again!

I offer this advice: If anyone asks you to go study or to go steady, ask them to spell it.

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As I was reading in the book of John recently, I paused to ponder the Savior's words when He said, "I am come that they [meaning you and me] might have life, and that they [you and me] might have it more abundantly."<sup>1</sup> Everything the Savior did and said was for the benefit of humankind. His Atonement, His example, and His teachings—everything was to help us not only to have a more abundant life on earth but also to attain the most abundant of all life—even eternal life.

Today I would like to emphasize three principles the Savior taught that will lead us to live a more abundant life.

One foundational principle is seeking light and truth. The Savior blesses those who "are seeking diligently to learn wisdom and to find truth."<sup>2</sup>

President James E. Faust said, "Opportunities for the abundant life increase as we pursue the quest for truth and knowledge."<sup>3</sup>

President David O. McKay, a great proponent of learning and education, said it this way: "To feel one's faculties unfolding and truth expanding the soul is one of life's sublimest experiences."<sup>4</sup>

Patricia Farr, a graduate of BYU, described such an experience in a letter to Elder Merrill J. Bateman when he was serving as president of this university. Patricia told of sitting in a physics class in which they

*were discussing fiber optics and how light travels perfectly through strands of plastic without losing energy. I realized as the lecture proceeded that all things point to Christ. Christ has all power and never "loses energy" as He influences our lives. I sat in awe at the understanding that came to me; not a physical understanding but a spiritual enlightenment filled my soul. I came out of that lecture on a spiritual high.*<sup>5</sup>

I don't believe that experiences like Patricia's are uncommon here at BYU.

In his inaugural address, President Kevin J. Worthen reaffirmed the mission of Brigham Young University:

*We are "to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life" by providing "a period of intensive learning" that includes not just "the arts, letters, and sciences" but also "the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ."*<sup>6</sup>

What a blessed opportunity it is to attend a university where one can learn both secular and spiritual truths simultaneously and not one at the expense of the other. In speaking about the uniqueness that underlies BYU, President Spencer W. Kimball said:

*This university shares with other universities the hope and the labor involved in rolling back the frontiers of knowledge, but we also know that, through divine revelation, there are yet "many great and important things" to be given to mankind which will have an intellectual and spiritual impact far beyond what mere men can imagine. Thus, at this university among faculty, students, and administration, there is, and there must be, an excitement and an expectation about the very nature and future of knowledge.*<sup>7</sup>

The search for knowledge, light, and truth is one of the reasons we are on earth. It is a lifelong pursuit that requires great effort and diligence on our part, whether by study or by faith.

Keith W. Wilcox, a member of the Church and a prominent architect, shared an experience from his university years that illustrates this truth. As part of his thesis while completing his master of architecture degree at the University of Oregon, his professor asked him to find one word or phrase that described the spirit of his church and then to design a church building that would demonstrate that word or phrase.

Keith responded to his professor that he felt a single word or phrase could not be found to describe the spirit of my church, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, since it is based upon all truth and therefore embraces all true, revealed religious beliefs and practices.

The professor disagreed. He felt strongly that what was missing from my thesis was a simple description of the spirit of my church and a design that would express it architecturally.

After the meeting, I left facing a challenge that, if not met, could well keep me from entering my chosen professional field. After pondering this dilemma, I decided to interview my priesthood leaders and other Church members in our ward. Many excellent suggestions for a single word or phrase to describe the spirit of the Church were made, including faith, eternal progression, revelation, the Book of Mormon, priesthood, prophets and apostles, and many others. I considered them all. But a means of satisfactorily expressing any of these gospel principles architecturally did not come to me.

With this delay in getting my degree, pressure mounted while I wrestled with the problem. For one thing, living costs for my family were becoming a concern. Then one night while pondering my problem, I realized I had not taken the challenge directly to our Father in Heaven. I had prayed for guidance and had sought out my priesthood leaders for advice, but I had not asked the Lord specifically for help in finding the word or phrase I needed. Humility filled my entire being. I had done all in my power to find an answer but had not been able to find a solution on my own. I truly needed direct help.

I found a quiet, private place to pray, and there I knelt and poured out my heart to my Heavenly Father. As I concluded my prayer, a word flashed into my mind: *enlightenment*. Then the phrase *light and enlightenment* followed. Joy swept through me. My prayer had been answered. I thought of how light and truth have been restored in our day through the Prophet Joseph Smith. As

*prophets, seers, and revelators, our Church leaders continue to offer light and truth to all who will listen. Our missionary efforts truly bring enlightenment to the world. Our temples glow with spiritual light. Eternal truths are taught and enlighten all who enter therein.*

Suddenly it was easy to envision a meaningful architectural design for one of our Church buildings. I decided to design a building that would allow light to penetrate from the heavens all day long and that would radiate light heavenward each evening.

The resubmission of my thesis that now illustrated the phrase *light and enlightenment* was accepted. My professors expressed great interest in both the history and my description of the spirit of our church.

I am grateful to our Father in Heaven for the insight and inspiration I received on that occasion. The deep meaning and spiritual significance of this experience have been a wonderful and continued blessing to me since that day.<sup>8</sup>

Keith “went on to design many significant buildings and was part of the design team for the Washington DC Temple and the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah.”<sup>9</sup>

In his recent general conference talk about receiving a testimony of light and truth, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said:

*The Everlasting and Almighty God . . . will speak to those who approach Him with a sincere heart and real intent.*

*He will speak to them in dreams, visions, thoughts, and feelings.*

*He will speak in a way that is unmistakable and that transcends human experience. He will give them divine direction and answers for their personal lives. . . .*

*. . . God cares about you. He will listen, and He will answer your personal questions. The answers to your prayers will come in His own way and in His own time, and therefore, you need to learn to listen to His voice.<sup>10</sup>*

A second principle of living the abundant life is revealed in Isaiah's words: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."<sup>11</sup>

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin echoed this thought when he said:

*Our search for the abundant life is cloaked not only in the robes of this mortal clay; its true end can only be comprehended from the perspective of the eternities that stretch infinitely before us.*<sup>12</sup>

Elder Wirthlin taught us that an eternal perspective is important in our quest for the abundant life.

In this journey of life, it is important for us to understand God's plan. Change, challenges, trials, and temptations are temporary and prepare us for eternal life.

In a speech Elder James A. Cullimore gave at BYU, he related an experience once told by religious writer Harleigh M. Rosenberger:

*Several years ago a man was being interviewed on the radio. He had started to walk across the United States on foot, from California to New York. He had reached a point halfway across. Reporters asked him about his experience. Finally the question came: "Sir, what would you say has been your most difficult experience so far?"*

*The traveler thought long. Through his mind went the toilsome climb over mountain passes; hot dry stretches of desert. Sun. Wind. Then he said quietly, "I guess my greatest problem was **that the sand kept getting into my shoes.**"*

*So that was it. The sand in his shoes. Not some great crisis that he had faced. Not some danger that had almost taken his life. But sand; sand that wore blisters on the soles of his feet. Sand that ground its way into the pores of his skin and irritated constantly, that made every step an agony. Sand in his shoes. . . .*

*. . . Now there was one hint that the hiker suggested when the sand got into his shoes. He had to stop and dump the sand from them.*<sup>13</sup>

In our journey in life we too are troubled with sand in our shoes—sand in the form of change, challenges, trials, and temptations. We can either let these things stop us short of our goal or we can find ways to dump the sand from our shoes and continue our journey.

My husband, Max, and I were married in the fall, and the next spring we both graduated from BYU. During this time the military draft was in force, and Max had received a letter indicating that he would be drafted into military service upon graduation. During Max's two years in the service I taught school near my hometown so that I could be near my family. After his service, Max worked with his family ranching operation for a year. Then we decided he should come back to BYU to get more education. Finances were tight, and I was expecting our first baby, but we were able to find a tiny basement apartment that fit our budget, and he started school. Shortly after, Max was called to be the Young Men president. He was a little concerned because his studies were rigorous and took a lot of time, but he accepted the calling.

One day my husband came home quite devastated. He had received a C on his first test in a class that was critical to his major. He had studied hard, and he began to doubt his ability to compete in that major. His shoes were filling with the sand of discouragement and doubt. For several days he couldn't eat or sleep as he worried about what to do. He considered giving up and going back to life on the ranch to do what he knew best and what he was comfortable with. After a lot of prayer and soul-searching, he decided to continue with his education, and he graduated with honors.

In hindsight, the C on a test was such a little thing, but often it is the little things—the little grains of sand—that distract us and keep us from seeing with an eternal perspective. I will always be grateful that my husband was willing to dump the sand from his shoes and move on. Because he was willing to pay

the price and move beyond his comfort zone, many doors of opportunity were opened to him. Throughout his life he has used his skills and knowledge not only to bless our family but many others as well.

Each new day brings with it the opportunity to evaluate where we are in terms of where we are going. Wherever we are on our journey, the Savior has made it possible, through His redeeming and enabling power, for us to dump the sand from our shoes. It is up to us to apply these powers in our life and to continue our journey strengthened with hope and faith. Heavenly Father and our Savior want you to succeed. President Thomas S. Monson expressed his confidence in your ability to do so when he said: “This is your world. The future is in your hands. The outcome is up to you.”<sup>14</sup>

A third principle of living an abundant life is feeling and expressing gratitude. The Lord promised:

*And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more.*<sup>15</sup>

In this year’s January *Ensign*, a young woman named Elizabeth Stitt shared an experience she had learning about the power of gratitude. Her story was inspiring to me not only because I know Elizabeth personally but because it was a message I needed as well.

Elizabeth shared her story:

*Several months after returning home from a mission, I had the opportunity to go back to the city where I served to do a research project to finish my undergraduate degree. As I traveled each day throughout the city to do my project, Heavenly Father blessed me in many ways. He guided my path and protected me. He gave me opportunities to share the gospel, and He multiplied my time so I could do my project and also visit many of the*

*people I taught, knew, and loved as a full-time missionary.*

*I felt so blessed that every morning and night I poured out my soul in gratitude to my Father for the chance to be there. Throughout the day I prayed in my heart, thanking Him when my plans went smoothly. And when they didn’t go smoothly, I thanked Him for the plan He had for me instead, which usually ended up being a better one anyway.*

*One day on the trip, I sat pondering my experiences. I wondered why Heavenly Father was helping me so much. The thought came clearly to my mind: “It is because you are being grateful.” That day I learned that sometimes gratitude precedes the blessing. The more grateful I was, the more I could recognize the blessings I received and appreciate the lessons I learned from difficulties. And the more I recognized the blessings and lessons, the more I had to be grateful for.*<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting how gratitude works. We think we are giving back to the Lord by being grateful, but instead the Lord blesses us still more—for being grateful.

We are so greatly blessed, and most of us have done very little to merit the many blessings given us. Every time I read in Deuteronomy 6 and 7, I reflect on how indebted I am to the Lord and to all those who have gone before and have sacrificed so much. After forty years in the wilderness, the Israelites came to a mountaintop overlooking the land of promise. As Moses prepared them to enter this land without him, he spoke to them as a dying father speaks to his children. He told them what awaited them:

*The Lord thy God shall [bring] thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers . . . to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not,*

*And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full;*

*Then beware lest thou forget the Lord.*<sup>17</sup>

This is every bit as much a message to modern-day Israel—you and me. Too often when we inherit or get things that others have worked and sacrificed so hard for, we don't appreciate them. Occasionally we are not as grateful. We might even feel entitled, expecting things to just be handed to us for the taking. Joseph Smith and the early Saints gave up all they had, sometimes several times, as they were driven from place to place for the gospel. Many sacrificed their very lives. We need to be grateful not only for those who went before and sacrificed so much but especially to be grateful to God from whom comes every good thing.

Now is our time to contribute—our time to build, our time to dig, and our time to plant.

President Gordon B. Hinckley explained the importance of each of our contributions:

*We must ever keep before us the big picture, while not neglecting the details. That large picture is a portrayal of the whole broad mission of the Church; but it is painted one brush stroke at a time through the lives of all members. . . .*

*Each of us, therefore, is important. Each is a brush stroke, as it were, on the mural of this vast panorama of the kingdom of God.*<sup>18</sup>

We have talked about having the abundant life through seeking light, truth, and knowledge; through looking through the lens of an eternal perspective; and through feeling and expressing gratitude. The abundant life can be ours as we take advantage of these and so many other opportunities that are available to us in this day.

I end with where I started. May we always remember that our Savior came that we "might have life, and that [we] might have it more abundantly."<sup>19</sup> I testify that He is the One who makes the abundant life possible. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. John 10:10.
2. D&C 97:1.
3. James E. Faust, "The Abundant Life," *Ensign*, November 1985, 8.
4. David O. McKay, *Stepping Stones to an Abundant Life*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 99.
5. Patricia Farr, letter to Merrill J. Bateman, 7 August 2000; quoted in Bateman, "Learning in the Light of Truth," BYU annual university conference address, 21 August 2000; Bateman, "Light, Visions, and Dreams," BYU devotional address, 19 September 2000; also Bateman, "The Light of Truth: Reaching BYU's Potential Requires Your Assistance," *Brigham Young Magazine*, winter 2000–2001, 4.
6. Kevin J. Worthen, "Enlightened, Uplifted, and Changed," BYU inauguration devotional address, 9 September 2014; quoting *The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* (Provo: BYU, 2014), 1, 2.
7. Spencer W. Kimball, "Installation of and Charge to the President," *Inaugural Addresses*, 14 November 1980 (Provo: BYU, 1980), 9; quoting Articles of Faith 1:9; see also Kimball, "The Second Century of Brigham Young University," BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.
8. Keith W. Wilcox, in "Mormon Journal: My Quest in Finding Light and Enlightenment," *Ensign*, April 1997, 49–50.
9. In "Mormon Journal: My Quest," 50.
10. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Receiving a Testimony of Light and Truth," *Ensign*, November 2014, 21.
11. Isaiah 55:8.
12. Joseph B. Wirthlin, "The Abundant Life," *Ensign*, May 2006, 102.
13. Harleigh M. Rosenberger, quoted in James A. Cullimore, "Dump the Sand from Your Shoes," BYU devotional address, 2 May 1967; emphasis in original; see also Rosenberger, "Dump the Sand," in *Thoughts Along the Road* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1966), 55.

14. Thomas S. Monson, "Decisions Determine Destiny," CES devotional address at BYU, 6 November 2005.

15. D&C 78:19.

16. Elizabeth Stitt, in "Heavenly Father Provided an Answer to Prayer When . . .," *Ensign*, January 2015, 21.

17. Deuteronomy 6:10–12.

18. Gordon B. Hinckley, "God Grant Us Faith," *Ensign*, November 1983, 53.

19. John 10:10.