

Gifts That Money Cannot Buy

HOWARD W. HUNTER

President Harvey L. Taylor, faculty, and students—all of you being my brothers and sisters—I am grateful for the privilege of standing today in this great fieldhouse at your devotional assembly. I bring you nothing startling. I merely came to chat with the students for a little while this morning during this devotional hour.

The Time for Decision

You are living in a wonderful age; you are living in the wonderful time of your lives. I often think of our lives as being like the sun crossing the sky. The period around dawn represents the time of birth and childhood. You live in that part of the day when the sun has just broken over the tops of the mountains and is giving you light and warmth in the early part of your life's day. The whole day lies ahead of you, and to make it worthwhile takes planning and thought. I believe you are at that point in life when you are giving thought and planning to the remainder of the day that lies ahead.

As children, you were cared for and all things were done for you. Then the teenage years followed the period of youth, and now you are at the wonderful time in life in which you find yourselves as university students.

You are on the threshold of life itself, and the path ahead is becoming visible to most of you. It is during this period of life that the path

commences to take shape, and since we can see its outline, we have a little better understanding of where we are going and what we are going to do. This is the time for decision.

Success requires a lot of careful planning, and you are here to form these plans and to make decisions to carry you forward in life. You have selected BYU as your university because of what it has to offer and what it can do for you in academic work and also in preparation for the spiritual side of life. I hope you have caught the vision of the spiritual side of your education as you have entered through these portals and have studied here. I am sure you fully realize the value of education as well as the value of the spiritual life.

Giving Brings the Greatest Happiness

Let us look backward for just a moment to our childhood and analyze that which gave us the greatest happiness when we were children. I am inclined to believe that the things that we enjoyed most and that gave us the greatest happiness when we were children were the things

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that were given to us. When our parents went away and returned, we always looked for some little token that they would bring back to us. We looked forward to Christmas because of the things we were going to receive. Our whole life was built around receiving. At that time we did not understand the other side of giving.

Sometime during our progress through this life we came to that point when we suddenly realized that it is not receiving that brings us happiness. To some this comes early in life, to others it comes later—and I am inclined to believe that there are some who never have this awakening during the daytime of their lives. They miss one of the great principles that brings happiness to us.

When the time comes that we learn to share and do things for other people, life takes on a new vision for us. This has come to the lives of most of you. To some it comes when a young man goes on a mission and he suddenly discovers that he is giving of himself, his time, his energy, and his means for the benefit of others. To some this awakening comes at marriage. Suddenly one discovers that happiness does not come from receiving but from that which one gives to another.

I am always impressed by the teachings of the Savior. He taught in simple, homely language. He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). This realization, of course, comes to us with maturity. It is the understanding of this lesson in life that brings about maturity; it changes our childhood ideas to the ideas and the ideals of adults.

Giving does not always consist of material things. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Rings and other jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of thyself.”¹ In this sense we have unlimited resources.

I realize that I am speaking today to persons of limited resources as far as material things are concerned, and it is no disgrace for a student to be poverty stricken. As I view you, I look above material value and see in you the

possibility of greatness as you give of yourself. I see young men preparing for missions. I see young men and young women preparing for marriage. I see students qualifying themselves to serve their fellowmen in business, in industry, and in the communities and in society wherever they may go after leaving this institution. I see many of you preparing for Church service and all of you preparing to serve God throughout your lives. I think these are the great values.

It is little acts of giving as we go along that brighten our lives.

Thomas Dreier tells the story of a man over eighty who was observed by a neighbor planting a small peach tree.

“Do you expect to eat peaches from that tree?” the neighbor asked.

The old gentleman rested on his spade. “No,” he said. “At my age I know I won’t. But all my life I’ve enjoyed peaches—never from a tree I had planted myself. I wouldn’t have had peaches if other men hadn’t done what I’m doing now. I’m just trying to pay the other fellows who planted peach trees for me.”²

The Gifts That Money Cannot Buy

The gifts that money cannot buy are those that bring happiness to us in life. These are the gifts we pass on to others from the attributes we acquire as we go through life.

First is the attribute of thoughtfulness to others.

Second, its close cousin, is consideration for others.

Third, we must have courage—courage to do the right thing always.

Fourth, those who have a good nature enjoy life. A pleasant smile begets smiles, smiles beget friends, and friends are better than fortunes.

Fifth is the attribute of tolerance. I think of an old Indian prayer: “Great Spirit, help me never to judge another until I have walked two weeks in his moccasins.”³

Sixth, we must have appreciation for those things that come to us or we never find happiness.

Seventh, we enjoy life when we have the ability to praise others for their good works. George Matthew Adams said, “He who praises another enriches himself far more than he does the one praised. To praise is an investment in happiness.”⁴ He also said, “The poorest human being often has something to give that the richest could not buy.”⁵

David Dunn told the story of a man walking down the sidewalk past a little girl sitting on the doorstep of a house looking very dejected. He said to her, “That’s a *very* pretty red dress you are wearing, young lady.”

She looked up at him and smiled and said, “Oh, thank you,” and her face lit up at this compliment. Later, when he passed her house again, she brightly said, “Hello—Man!”⁶

He had found a friend. It is easy to find friends as we pass this way if we acquire the attributes that attract friends. Friends are some of our most priceless possessions. Robert Louis Stevenson is attributed as saying, “A friend is a present you give yourself.”⁷

Eighth, to find happiness we must help others as we go through life. Elihu Root, U.S. secretary of state from 1905 to 1909, wrote:

*I observe that there are two entirely different theories according to which individual men seek to get on in the world. One theory leads a man to pull down everybody around him in order to climb up on them to a higher place. The other leads a man to help everybody around him in order that he may go up with them.*⁸

If we rise to success in life, it is because we have lifted others up with us. I like to think of success as a journey, not as a destination. Happiness is found along the way of this journey, not at the end of the road. The time for happiness is today, not tomorrow. The following was written more than a century ago:

*I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.*⁹

We are wise when we follow good examples in life. We should pattern our lives after the examples of those who have been successful in the important things of life. We must distinguish between the things that are important and those that are not.

I have had the pleasure of sitting as a member of the board of trustees of Brigham Young University with great men—men of importance, men whom you admire—under President David O. McKay as chairman of that board. When I think of the leadership of this university, its presidency, and its faculty, I am impressed and thrilled by the advantage you have as students in this great institution. Nowhere in the world can a comparable situation be found, for there is no other.

I am sure you all realize that the trustees, the presidency, and the faculty have an interest in you as students in this school. Every tithepayer in the Church extends to you a helping hand, for you know that the amount you pay does not cover all the costs of your education. This is the spirit of giving. Those who have gone this way before are willing to extend a helping hand to you, knowing that you will appreciate this and that the time will come when you will have the opportunity to reach back with your extended hand to help others come this way. And so we share with each other, we encourage each other, and we find happiness by giving and not by receiving.

The Gift of Appreciation

And it came to pass, as [Jesus] went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:

And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,

And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? [Luke 17:11–17]

Appreciation is one of the great attributes that brings us happiness as we travel this way, yet of the ten who were healed, only one expressed appreciation. Are we among the nine?

I had a sad errand to perform one day as I went with a mission president to tell an elder in the field of the passing of his father. He met us at the door to tell us how thrilled he was with the work of that day and what had been accomplished. Then we asked him to sit down for a moment, and we delivered the message. I shall never forget the experience.

He said, “I have learned a lot of things since I have been out in the field and have had time to think them through. I wish I could have talked to my father one more time because I had so many things to tell him.”

This is true of most of us in life. The letter we did not write, the word of appreciation we intended to express but did not take the time to do so—there are so many little things we could have done to brighten our lives and to brighten the lives of others. These are the lessons we do not learn until we cross over the threshold in life in which we find that the words of Jesus are so true: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

The Lesson of Giving

When we learn this lesson of giving, we are on the high road. Our lives change, our attitudes change, maturity develops, and we

are ready to face life. If each day we could be kind and courteous and thoughtful, our circle of friends would increase. If we could forget the grumbling and all the other things that are negative, how bright our lives would become. We can do it if we will merely follow the counsel of the Savior, think of Him and His life, and lift ourselves by living close to the Spirit and that inspiration. He will bless us, walk with us, and extend His hand to us, and life will become what we would like it to be—high, noble, and elevated.

May the Lord bless you as students to learn the value of gifts that money cannot buy and the lesson of this great university, I humbly pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

Notes

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Gifts,” *Essays: Second Series* (1844).
2. David Dunn, “Bread upon the Waters,” *Try Giving Yourself Away* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1956, 1947), 22.
3. In Dunn, “The Priceless Gift of Tolerance,” *Try Giving*, 43.
4. George Matthew Adams, “Praise Where Praise Is Due,” *Today’s Talk, Gettysburg Times*, 30 May 1946, 4.
5. George Matthew Adams, “Our Debt to Others,” *Today’s Talk, Gettysburg Times*, 19 August 1946, 4.
6. Dunn, “The Finest Heart Tonic in the World,” *Try Giving*, 68.
7. See “Spurious Quotations,” The Robert Louis Stevenson Archive, robert-louis-stevenson.org/richard-dury-archive/nonquotes.htm.
8. Elihu Root, letter to Brazilian ambassador Joaquim Nabuco, 28 November 1905; in Philip C. Jessup, *Elihu Root*, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1938), 1:473.
9. Attributed to Stephen Grellet; see Stephen Grellet, Wikiquote, en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Stephen_Grellet.