

Acquiring Spiritual Literacy

SPENCER W. KIMBALL

My brothers and sisters, it is a delightful experience to be with you again today in this spacious building. As remarks were made at the beginning of this meeting concerning cleaning up our home and grounds, I thought of something that Brigham Young is reputed to have said. He had been to St. George and was traveling back to Salt Lake City when he stopped in a town he had visited on his way to St. George and in which he had instructed the people to clean up their yards. He said, "I told you when I went down that I wouldn't call on you again if you didn't take care of your yard-work." And he said, "Now I am back, and it hasn't been done so I am not going to stop." That, of course, was rather disappointing to the people.

I want to tell you an experience about my BYU days. You didn't know I was a BYU student, did you? When the time came for me to begin my schooling here, I settled all the arrangements and came on the train from Arizona up to Salt Lake. From Salt Lake I took the inter-urban railroad to Provo and to the school I planned to attend. As I got off this inter-urban and got my suitcases about me, I looked around and saw a great white building on the hill in the distance. I thought, "Well, that's the BYU, all right." So I gathered my

things together, and I walked all that distance from Center Street up to this white building that was so attractive. When I got close to the building, I saw many men in their overalls working in the yards. So I walked on up straight into the building, and got me a drink at the water fountain, but at about this time I realized I was in the wrong place. So I turned around and went out the door and came down into town where I found people who directed me to the BYU campus. At any rate, that was the first of my BYU days. After I finally found the school, I remember that we went to class for one week, and then we went to the peach orchards for the second and third and fourth weeks. But by that time, the man in charge of the military in my home town sent me a telegram from Safford, Arizona, and said, "Please get down here in a hurry. Your turn for the Army has come." So I rushed back to Safford to take care of my responsibility as it was outlined for me.

Spencer W. Kimball was President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 9 September 1980.

I have always loved BYU and have always been very, very proud of it. It is a great institution; it has influenced and shaped many, many wonderful people. I should like to say just a few words this morning to tell you that I love each of you. I love you as I love all the people of this Church, some four and one-half million of them. I have enjoyed my associations with BYU and have watched with great eagerness as the time has come for me to visit this school at different times. I am very happy to be with you today and to be able to talk to you good folks at the beginning of this academic year at Brigham Young University.

There is no way that anyone can fully appreciate all the dreams, hopes, plans, and sacrifices that have preceded this moment in your lives. Whether you have come for the first time to this campus or are continuing your studies, I am sure you are appreciative of the sacrifices of your parents and others who are largely responsible for sustaining you at the BYU.

I am sure you are aware, too, of the sacrifice that they and the other tithepayers of the Church gladly make to sustain and support this important university. As you know, your contribution in the form of tuition and fees covers only about a third of the cost of your education here. I mention that fact not to make you anxious, but to help you appreciate the special blessings that are yours.

In the years ahead, a smaller and smaller percentage of the college students of the Church will be able to attend this university. More and more of our youth will be attending their local institutions of learning where they also will be well served by participation in our institute programs throughout the world. As I look at this vast audience today, I realized that although you appear to be many, you are in reality a very select few.

You have already been well instructed by President Holland and others on the importance of maintaining the special standards that

go with attending this university. There is no need, therefore, for me to add to that, except to assure you that I endorse wholeheartedly all that President Holland said to you last Tuesday and then to remind you that you have voluntarily and freely committed yourselves to a code of conduct that we fully and confidently expect you to live up to. To do otherwise would be to break faith not only with yourselves, but with the trustees, administration, faculty, and staff of this university, at which we endeavor to maintain a very special climate. We know you will honor the commitments you have made to come to this great university.

We will have an opportunity to welcome President Holland more officially at his inauguration, but we commend to you your wonderful new president along with his able colleagues in the administration of this university. Not only are the students assembled on this campus special, but so are the men and women who comprise its administration, its faculty, and its staff. They, too, have dreamed, hoped, prayed, and sacrificed, just as you have, to be a part of this very special community of scholars and students. Draw upon their knowledge and fellowship in both school and Church capacities during the special time you are privileged to be on this campus. Be ever mindful, however, that in reality the world is your campus and that you have come here to learn so that you may go forth to serve! You are trustees of your talents—use them wisely and gloriously.

I am mindful of the fact that this is Student Life Week, with the theme of “Reaching Out.” That is a good theme, not just for a week, but for the whole year. Everyone needs to reach out, and we all need to be reached. Everyone benefits when we extend our concerns beyond ourselves—then our reach is lengthened, as well as our stride.

Be serious about your studies. This is a university. Your minds need to be filled and stretched and trained. Adequate social

opportunities are available, and these are important in terms of balance in your life, but do not subordinate your studies to the fleeting things of the moment.

Speaking of things of the moment and social diversions, let me add one word of caution. The other night, Sister Kimball and I watched, by means of video cassette, an older movie, *The Sound of Music*. It was delightful. The music was beautiful, the acting superb, the scenery magnificent. It was wholesome and entertaining in every way. We had a wonderful, relaxing evening together. However, as you well know, it is difficult nowadays to find such entertainment. I would warn you against the R- and X-rated movies that unfortunately seem to be so prevalent these days. For the most part, they are filled with violence, sex, profanity, and crime. I can hardly imagine that any young man at the BYU, or elsewhere in the Church, would ever think of taking his lovely date to such a movie.

Again, I urge you to work hard while you are here. The information, attitudes, and training you receive here will permit you to serve hundreds of others during the balance of your lives. So, in a very real sense, those who are not here today to speak for themselves need to be spoken for—by way of urging you to be true to your trust in this privileged learning adventure that carries with it special duties and obligations. Do not join the parade of pleasure seekers; it is too large already! Do not seek selfish fulfillment, for it will leave you desolate.

I am pleased Sister Kimball could be with me and speak today. I want you to know how grateful I have been, so many times, for the wonderful education she received at BYU. It has helped her to be a most delightful and brilliant eternal companion, a wonderful mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother; and excellent leader in the Church; and a wonderful neighbor. Her basic training, of course, came in her early family life, but her years here were significant, and I hope you will ponder

her words. She is an educated woman—both intellectually and spiritually—and this has made her a significant woman and, frankly, a delightful and interesting person to be with, in addition to all the other reasons I have for loving her.

You, too, will be someone's companion, and that special one deserves to have you be a prepared companion, not only in this life, but forever. In the Church, we continue to believe in "education for eternity." You should approach your studies in that grand and vigorous way.

Though my message to you today is brief, it is from my heart. In your pursuit of truth, remember that while some truths matter more than others, all true principles are a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no true principle that we need to fear. For example, the great leader for whom this university is named said:

Our religion measures, weighs, and circumscribes all the wisdom in the world—all that God has ever revealed to man. God has revealed all the truth that is now in the possession of the world, whether it be scientific or religious. The whole world are under obligation to him for what they know and enjoy; they are indebted to him for it all, and I acknowledge him in all things. [Discourses of Brigham Young, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941), p. 2]

However, there is a lot in the world that attempts to pass itself off as truth when it is not. A good education will help you to distinguish between sense and nonsense. As you also receive real literacy in things spiritual, you will have added discernment with which to weigh and test ideas and assertions as you make decisions and judgments.

In addition to being serious about your scholarship, do not be unduly fearful about conditions in the world. Be noticing. Be aware. But be of good cheer, and also be about

your Father's business. The Lord has promised us, again and again, that He will watch over His people and lead them along.

This is the Lord's work. He knows the end from the beginning. His work will surely

triumph. Strive, my brothers and sisters, to be an educated and effective part of this great work. May God be with you! I love you and give you my blessings in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.