

# *Where Much Is Given: Some Thoughts on Appreciation*

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**L**ike you, I rejoice at the beginning of this school year. From the time I began the first grade (Arizona didn't have kindergarten in those days), late August and early September have always been among my favorite times of year, precisely because that is when school starts. Every year since that time, I have always felt the same way, and I feel it in even extra measure this year because for me, as for almost 5,000 of you, the fall of 1989 marks a new chapter in my own educational experience. I have been involved in this school in four different capacities over a period of thirty-six years, but this year, as for thousands of you, I am starting something new and exciting at BYU.

## **Appreciating What We Have**

I want to talk to you today about appreciation, about understanding what we have, and about what we ought to do and be because we have it. I will begin by talking to you about two people, neither of whom is here today. One is a member of your generation, and the other belongs to mine.

A BYU security officer called Thursday evening, August 31, with news that I know I will periodically receive as president of BYU, but which I will always dread—the news of the

death of one of our students. As the officer began to give me some of the details, my mind flashed back to my student days. I remembered how President Wilkinson used to agonize over such tragedies—how he and his successors had implored students to drive carefully as they went home for Christmas or for other reasons. And now it was happening to me—the death of a student on my watch. I tried to imagine how some family—father and mother, brothers and sisters—might be feeling at that moment. Where does the family live, I wondered: Roanoke, Virginia; Youngstown, Ohio; Spokane, Washington; Fillmore, Utah; where? As the security officer finished her report, I rather perfunctorily asked the student's name. I was not prepared for the answer: Chris Felsted.

At that moment my agony turned from general to specific. I no longer had to think about hypothetical parents. I know them: Peter and Karen Felsted—caring, loving parents—devoted Latter-day Saints who have been friends of Janet's and mine for fourteen years. Three hours earlier their oldest son was alive,

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*Rex E. Lee was president of Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 12 September 1989.*

seemingly robust, and starting BYU with a big head start on a lifetime of future happiness with twenty-four hours of AP credit and \$8,000 saved for his mission. But now no more. In a brief, terrible moment all of that was snuffed out. The middle phase of Christian Daniel Felsted's eternal existence had lasted just slightly less than eighteen years.

The second story is about Terry Crapo, who for twenty-four years, from 1958 to 1982, was one of my closest friends. We graduated from Brigham Young University at the same time and in the same major. We thought alike, we worked in student government together, we had the same long-range career objectives, and most people said we even looked alike.

Terry was a brilliant lawyer, a remarkably successful father and stake president. Whenever I was involved in something really important, I wanted Terry on my team. When I was the student body president here, he was my executive assistant. Fifteen years later, I recruited him for the Law School faculty, where he was voted professor of the year. And in the summer of 1982, after I had been the solicitor general for about a year, I was making arrangements to bring Terry to Washington to work as my deputy.

But then, another phone call—seven years earlier than the one I received twelve days ago. It was from Elder Hugh Pinnock, informing me that Terry had cancer. Cancer. A dreadful word. My conversation with Terry right after I received that phone call was our last in this life. Less than two weeks later, he was dead.

For days I could not accept that it had really happened. This was Terry Crapo. He was my height, my weight, we looked alike, our families were about the same age, we were both lawyers, both loved life, our families, the gospel, and each other. I have had other friends to whom I have felt as close as Terry, but none with whom I personally identified quite so completely. He just couldn't be dead. For several days I kept hoping that somehow, as my friend Lisa Hawkins said in a poem composed

for Terry's funeral, he would, Tom Sawyer-like, come back and surprise us all. But he didn't. He had forty-four very good years in this mortal existence, but that was all.

I have had another reaction to Terry's passing that, unlike the first, has endured and had a rather profound influence on me. Terry is gone and I am not. This spiritual, philosophical, and emotional twin of mine had only forty-four years here. Every year that I have beyond that number is a bonus. So make the most of every one of those. No point asking why those bonus years were given to me rather than to Terry. The fact is they were, so I must do something with them.

The same is true, of course, for you. Most of you were not as close to your classmate, Chris Felsted, as I was to Terry Crapo, but that does not diminish the point. Leave aside for now why it is that bad things happen to good people, or why it is that you and I are still here while Terry Crapo and Chris Felsted are not. (Aspects of those issues, incidentally, are what Janet and I intend jointly to discuss with you next January.) But for today, the point is that you and I are still here, living our lives and experiencing the joys of this existence while one of the choicest people in my generation and one of the best in yours are not. What message does that fact carry for you and for me?

It is one of the sad ironies of human behavior that we really don't appreciate some of life's advantages like we should unless and until we are forced to spend some time without them. Recall Nephi's profound statement: "For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11). I doubt that very many of you wake up each morning full of gratitude for electricity. But occasionally we are without it for a couple of hours, as we were on this campus one cold morning last February. When that happens, we appreciate electricity much more. For maybe the rest of the day.

About twelve years ago I became a runner, and since that time it has been one of the truly

pleasurable and positive aspects of my life. But my appreciation of that activity has been increased immeasurably because on three separate occasions over those twelve years, twice because of ankle injuries and once because of cancer, I have had to go without it for rather extended periods.

Some variant of that basic experience pattern has occurred in every one of your lives. When you have an illness, even something as simple as a cold, you find yourselves longing for the times when you were healthy, and wondering why you didn't appreciate those times more fully. Your appreciation for food is never quite as high as it is on the first Sunday of each month. For many of us, reading assignments are a pain. Do you suppose we would look at them a little differently if we were blind?

Sometimes, temporary deprivations can change those attitudes, and sometimes they don't. A cold or some other fairly short-range, minor illness is the classic example. Time after time, during one of those down periods, I remind myself what a contrast there is between good health and bad health, and I vow that once the good times come back, I will appreciate them for what they are. But those good intentions usually don't last very long.

As I have observed these cycles, I have thought often of the ten lepers whom the Savior cured, only one of whom even took the time to go back and express his gratitude. I am fearful that one out of ten is probably a fairly accurate measurement of our human gratitude quotient.

I also believe that the probability of our likely appreciation for anything of which we have once been deprived is directly proportionate to the magnitude and gravity of that deprivation, as well as to the imminence of its being permanent. The extremes are illustrative. At the one end, not one of my seven children has ever been impressed with the argument that they should eat their broccoli because people are starving in Cambodia. And I have

already alluded to my own inability to sustain an appreciation for freedom from the common cold. If, by contrast, my friend Terry Crapo had recovered from cancer, he would have spent the rest of his years with an appreciation for life that he never would have had if cancer had not come into his life.

You ask how I am so confident about that fact, and I will answer your question. I know someone—very much like Terry Crapo—who also had cancer, came very close to death, but, unlike Terry, survived. I may not always be as appreciative as I should of the fact that I don't currently have a cold, or that the electricity is working, or that four years have passed since I had a broken ankle. But an appreciation for life itself, and the fact that at the end of October 1987 I was able to take Janet's hand and walk out of that hospital—bald, nauseated, and weak, but nevertheless alive—is in an entirely different category. Literally, never a day goes by—not one—without something happening (and usually it happens several times each day) that serves as a pointed reminder of how grateful I am to be alive, to have a range of mobility greater than four feet from an I.V. pole, and the freedom to go where I want to go, do what I want to do, associate with the people of my choice, run with my friends, live with my family, watch them grow, and, generally, to participate in the joys of this earthly experience.

But the focus of today's discussion is not me; it is you. I am not the one who needs motivation for an appreciation of life and the things that can be done with it. Cancer followed by chemotherapy will do that very nicely. Today's objective is to provide a shortcut for you to reach that same end without having to go through the same process, which I really do not recommend.

The fact of the matter is, my fellow students, you are alive, and Chris Felsted is not—just as I am alive and Terry Crapo is not. Does that mean anything?

Had he lived, Chris Felsted would have been a student at BYU. He will not now have that experience. But you do. What will you do with it?

The Doctrine and Covenants tells us that where much is given, much is required. Not expected, but required. What you have been given is life, and what is required of you is to live it to the fullest. The phase of your lives that is immediately before you, and the one on which you need to concentrate right now, is a BYU education.

### **A Unique Opportunity**

A BYU education is unique—not just different, not just distinctive, but unique. Unique means literally “one of a kind,” and there is no other university in the world that offers the combination of educational opportunities and advantages available here. If you do the job right—if you fulfill your “required” part for what you have been given—then you will be as well prepared in the things that the world expects from a college education as if you had taken your training at any other great university. At other institutions of higher learning, undergraduate college education consists of general education and major, or focused education. Those you will get here, also. But what makes BYU unique is the bonus, the third element—your religious education, which consists not only of what happens in the classroom, but also the entire environment in which we study and learn—an environment that not only recognizes the reality of the restored gospel, but attempts to incorporate its principles as an integral part of our total educational effort. In short, college education here includes everything that other good universities offer, plus something that you could find at no university except this one.

What you have been given is an educational opportunity that, judged by the world’s standards, is one of the very best, and judged by our own unique standards, is in a class by

itself. What is required of you is to take full advantage of all aspects of that opportunity. First and foremost, you are students. You are here to study and to learn. There are other opportunities here that make that process more enjoyable and more full—things like dances, plays, and athletic events. I urge you to take full advantage of them, particularly the forums and devotionals, the eighteen-stake firesides, and your various ward and stake activities. Equally important, you should see them not in isolation, but as part of the broader learning process.

You have more freedom, more leeway to exercise your own choices now that you are in college than you ever previously enjoyed. That kind of freedom of choice is an important part of becoming an adult. It is also an important part of the Lord’s eternal plan. Use that new freedom like an adult. Use it wisely and for its intended purpose, to study and to learn. Our school song, entitled “The College Song,” has some pretty good advice in that respect. It reminds us that we have come “to work, to live, to do.” I urge you to do all three of those. BYU can be an enjoyable place, even a fun place, but what you are engaged in here is not a game. It involves nothing less than laying the foundation stones not only for this life, but for the eternities.

Another aspect of what is required because of what you have been given concerns your BYU citizenship. You are citizens of this university, and citizenship here, as elsewhere, carries a corresponding commitment not only to the values, traditions, and goals that you have set for yourselves, but also those of the institution of which you are members. At most universities, those citizenship obligations include academic commitments such as I have just discussed. We are no different in that respect. But citizenship at BYU goes beyond academics. It includes our code of honor.

Our code of honor involves some issues that are rooted in policy rather than doctrine,

such as our dress and grooming standards. It also embraces other values solidly anchored in doctrine, such as our requirements for honesty in the classroom, in the examination room, and all other places, as well as our standards of sexual morality. Unlike other good universities, sexual promiscuity, involving either homosexual relations or heterosexual relations outside the bonds of marriage, is not simply the concern of the participants. BYU's moral standard is a condition of admission, well understood and accepted at the time of admission, and is also a condition for continuing enrollment.

One element of our honor code, avoidance of drug abuse, is based not only on policy and doctrine; it is also President Bush's major domestic policy initiative. As a university we fully support the president's program, and our board of trustees has formally adopted a resolution to this effect. Drug abuse has literally become an international cancer. We will not tolerate it in any form on this campus, and on behalf of all members of the university family, I pledge our efforts to help stamp it out. Whatever standards and practices may be legally enforced, our own are very clear. Drug abuse in any form and in any quantity has no place here and will not be tolerated.

At one level, we may not all be in agreement on every aspect of the Honor Code. That is certainly true of the dress and grooming standards. I have no doubt that if given the opportunity, each of you would have some sage advice as to parts of those requirements that might be changed.

I would hope there would be virtually no disagreement as to those matters that are doctrinally based. Ponder with me if you will on this fact, which is highly relevant to our general subject of appreciating what we have and making the most of it: with all of mankind's magnificent scientific accomplishments, including advances in the field of medical science, the one thing that man has never even come close to achieving is the creation of life. We have

made remarkable progress in our ability to preserve life. But we cannot create it. Not even in its most elementary forms. That power belongs to our Heavenly Father. He has shared it with us. Thus, he has given to us, his children, this most mysterious and in a very real sense the greatest of all powers, the power to create life. He has given us one accompanying commandment, which has existed over the millennia of recorded civilization. It is that the urge to use the processes by which we create life be confined within the bounds the Lord himself has set. The sexual relationship between husband and wife is one of the cornerstones of a good marriage, and the process by which life itself is created. Each of us has a commitment to confine those relationships within the marriage context, and that is also a central part of our honor code and what it means to be a BYU citizen.

There is, of course, a temptation to say, "Of course I recognize the importance of moral cleanliness. It is one of the foundation stones of my religion, and whether I am at BYU or anywhere else, I will observe it. But the length of my hair, if I'm a man, or the length of my skirt, if I'm a woman, is in an entirely different category."

The sense in which those two are in different categories is, as already observed, that the one is based on policy and the other on doctrine. But for citizens of BYU, faculty and students alike, all parts of our honor code rise to the level of moral principles. The reason is that each of us, prior to and as a condition of our employment or enrollment here, made a promise, a covenant, to keep and obey those standards. The moral principle, therefore, rises above and exists apart from the intrinsic merit of skirt lengths, or hair lengths, or shorts, or beards. It is a matter of integrity, of complying with what we promised to do. And whether we agree or disagree with given aspects of the dress and grooming standards is irrelevant to that commitment.

All of the constituent elements of our honor code are important to this university, and are important to me personally. Unlike other things that are important, I hope this is one that will need little attention because it will take care of itself. It really ought to require little attention, because it should be self-enforced by all of us who have agreed to it. I remember Elder Oaks' statement in his very first devotional address to this student body eighteen years ago that he hoped the razor and the tape measure would not become the symbols of his administration. I share that hope. I would like to ask each of you to help me bring that hope to reality.

What I have tried to do today is bring all of us to a greater appreciation of what we have here at BYU. Two weeks ago, from this pulpit, Elder Maxwell gave another perspective to this same theme by pointing out that attendance at Brigham Young University is becoming an ever more scarce, and therefore more valuable, resource. He pointed out that "estimates of the Church's Young Adult population show that of 1,080,000 young adults worldwide, only 2.4 percent attend BYU. Focusing on just young adults in the U.S. and Canada, barely over 7 percent can attend BYU."

We are so pleased that you are here. We rejoice with you and your parents at our opportunity to share with you this rare and valuable experience that we call a BYU education. Let us make the most of it.

Let me conclude by reading to you one of the most touching statements that I have heard

or read. It is part of a letter from a mother to her son. The mother is my friend, Karen Felsted. The letter was written to her son, Christian Daniel Felsted, four days after his death, and read to him at his funeral.

*When I sent you off, I thought I was sending you to BYU. How excited and happy you were to go! And because you were happy, I was happy for you to go, too, because we had reached that sweet/sad crossroads in our family life when it was time for you to be on your own, and for us to step more into the background of your life. Well, it seems that we have sent you to an even greater experience, and that we will be even deeper in the background of your life than we had thought, and that the happy re-associations I had looked forward to will not be the Christmas and summer vacations, but will be in the Own Due Time of the Lord. That's a little harder to wait for—but I will wait, and I will look forward to it. . . . We'll leave your body here close to BYU—this is where you came to be.*

May I say to you, as Karen Felsted said to her son, this is also where each of you came to be. May you take full advantage of it. May you and I, every year, every month, and every day, appreciate the fact that we are alive and able to take advantage of the BYU experience, and may we through the things that we do manifest our gratitude to our Heavenly Father for the fact we are alive and have the opportunities that life offers. This I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.