

Rise and Shout and Shine Forth!

S. GIFFORD NIELSEN

I pray that the Spirit will be with us to prompt our thinking as we join together today. It is an honor for me to be with you. Having my nephew Mike play the organ and my grandchildren Ashlyn and Drew give the prayers just adds to the joy.

Looking on the Bright Side

Our son shared a story told to him by a teacher at BYU recounting a family's experience while hosting an apostle in their home during a stake conference weekend. The mother was anxious to prepare things as perfectly as possible for their respected visitor, yet she found it challenging to keep the house clean while her rambunctious young boys ran and played from room to room. In an act of desperation, after carefully cleaning the guest bathroom, she pinned a note to the towels that read, "Touch these—you die!"

The note did the trick, because when the guest arrived, the house looked tidy and all went well. After the apostle left, the weary hostess was just about to sit down to relax when she had a horrifying thought: "Did anyone ever take the note off the towels?"

Running to the guest bathroom, she was mortified at what she saw. The note was still in place and the bath towels were clean and dry, but hanging on a hook nearby was a totally soaked hand

towel. Can you imagine what was going through her mind? This story became a treasure that brought the family closer together as they chose to find the humor in the experience.

We all have days that go very differently than planned. The mother could have let this incident make her feel like a failure. Instead, she looked at the bright side of an embarrassing situation. Marjorie Pay Hinckley, the wife of President Gordon B. Hinckley, said, "The only way to get through life is to laugh your way through it. You either have to laugh or cry. I prefer to laugh. Crying gives me a headache."¹

"Arise and Shine Forth"

How do *you* handle life's challenges and not let them bring you down? In Doctrine and Covenants 115:5 the Lord told us, "Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations." The phrase "arise and shine forth" reminds me of the BYU fight song. I love this university! While I was a student here, I played basketball and football, and one of my fondest memories as an athlete was

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to run on the court or the field to the sound of
“Rise and shout, the Cougars are out.”

Have you ever seriously thought about the
words to the fight song and pondered their
meaning?

*Rise, all loyal Cougars, and hurl your challenge to
the foe.*

You will fight day or night, rain or snow.

Loyal, strong, and true,

Wear the white and blue.

While we sing, get set to spring.

*Come on, Cougars, it's up to you!*²

Let me share with you some lessons I have
learned from people who exemplify the meaning
of this spirited anthem.

LaVell and Patti Edwards

Legendary football coach LaVell Edwards
embodied the essence of these lyrics. He taught us
to “rise, all loyal Cougars, and hurl your challenge
to the foe.” Regardless of our opponent, he trained
us to “fight day or night, rain or snow.” He was a
genius at bringing people together, although his
countenance on the field was rather subdued. It
didn't look like he was having much fun. In fact,
he stated this about himself: “Someone once said
I'm actually a happy guy. I just forgot to tell my
face.”³

But regardless of his game face, oh, how we
loved him and learned from him! We wanted to
do our best for him, and we did!

He changed college football by establishing a
successful passing offense instead of the running
game so prevalent in the early 1970s. His desire
was to have “the white and blue” recognized and
respected each time we played. He hired the right
coaches, recruited players who fit the system, and
made sure things operated smoothly. LaVell's suc-
cessful record speaks for itself. At his retirement,
he was the sixth winningest coach in the history
of Division 1 NCAA football.⁴ And he even has a
stadium named after him.

LaVell Edwards placed responsibility on the
players to become better than they thought they

could be. He asked us to “get set to spring,” and
we started to accomplish remarkable things.

In 1976, as the quarterback of this powerful
team, I began to receive national recognition and
honors. In 1977 we started the season red-hot. We
won the first three games impressively and were
nationally ranked, leading the country in many
categories for offense as we headed to Corvallis to
play Oregon State. During the fourth quarter of
the contest, I was hit hard in the left knee, and I
heard a pop. I didn't want to leave the field. How
ironic that a few plays later the same knee was hit
again, and I knew that something was seriously
wrong.

Caught up in the emotion of the moment, I per-
severed to finish the drive, but we failed to score a
touchdown when we needed it most. As I hobbled
to the sidelines, my knee felt unstable, and I knew
I was finished for the day. I was replaced, and, to
make matters worse, we lost the game.

During the flight back to Utah, worries con-
sumed me. I felt anxious and fearful as I won-
dered what my future might hold. One doubt
I had was about the success of our team. We
had worked hard together to build a nationally
respected program. Would I be letting everyone
down?

At the Salt Lake airport, I was met by my wife,
Wendy, who was worried but extremely support-
ive. We made our way to BYU's Smith Fieldhouse,
where we met Coach Edwards, athletic director
Glen Tuckett, trainer Marv Roberson, and
Dr. Robert Metcalf, who examined my knee. The
look on the doctor's face said it all. My college
football career was over. I needed immediate
surgery to repair a detached ligament.

How quickly our lives can change. I was
devastated.

Where do you turn when life gets hard? In my
state of mild shock, I needed additional strength,
and it was right in front of me. I asked for a priest-
hood blessing. Without hesitation, these four
remarkable “loyal, strong, and true” leaders were
ready and worthy to act in the name of the Savior.
A feeling of peace came over me as my fear turned
to faith.

The operation was a success! To this day, and even through six years of playing in the National Football League, I have never had another problem with my knee.

The priesthood is not to be taken casually or lightly. It is “the power and authority that God gives to man to act in all things necessary for the salvation of God’s children.”⁵

I was grateful for honorable men who were ready at a moment’s notice to bless me. When I woke up the next morning after surgery, I tackled my “new normal.” I opened my scriptures and reviewed a list of priorities I had written before the season began.

1. The Savior and our eternal family.
2. The Church and building the kingdom.
3. My education at this great university.
4. My football team and athletic goals.

As I looked at life from an eternal perspective, I realized that in reality, very little had changed.

In the weeks that followed, my good friend and fellow quarterback Marc Wilson led the team to one victory after another—breaking passing records and gaining even greater national attention. So much for the concern that my team couldn’t be successful without me. What a powerful lesson that was! Because of my respect and love for my team, it became a privilege to offer support from the sidelines—although I have to admit that it was difficult standing there using crutches and not being on the field.

Another person who lives the spirit of “rise, all loyal Cougars” is Coach Edwards’s wife, Patti. She played an important role in LaVell’s coaching success. They were totally unified, illustrating the scripture “I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27).

In fact, Coach Edwards looked much happier when he was with Patti. They have a wonderful family and hundreds of football players and their wives who think of them as second parents. Successful marriages don’t just happen. They require time, effort, hard work, constant communication, and a deep spiritual foundation.

The Edwardses knew this and did many things to improve their relationship. They spent Friday mornings before home games in the temple to make sure they kept life in perspective. Through their actions they taught us the importance of being in the Lord’s house and keeping sacred covenants. Later in life they also served a successful mission to New York. Watching Patti and LaVell demonstrate support for each other and commitment to the Lord provided a wonderful example for us. They never stopped teaching.

In December 2012, LaVell underwent open-heart surgery. Just after the operation, while still connected to tubes and groggy from the anesthesia, LaVell struggled to say, “Patti, be sure to call the bishop and tell him we can’t make it to tithing settlement, but tell him we are full tithe payers.”

They walked the walk of honor and commitment, understanding that “Cougars, it’s up to you.” Here was one of the most successful coaches in the history of college football humbly demonstrating his commitment to the principle of tithing just moments after major surgery.

Together, Patti and LaVell demonstrated to all of us obedience, integrity, and faithfulness. They lived the Savior’s teaching to “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (3 Nephi 13:33).

Victory Stories

*Oh! Rise and shout, the Cougars are out along the trail
to fame and glory.*

*Rise and shout, our cheers will ring out as you unfold
your vict’ry story.*

*On you go to vanquish the foe for alma mater’s sons
and daughters.*

*As we join in song, in praise of you, our faith is strong.
We’ll raise our colors high in the blue and cheer our
Cougars of BYU.*

It was a blessing to learn so young that the “vict’ry story” was never mine alone. “The trail to fame and glory” has nothing to do with our worldly ego and requires keeping our eyes fixed on eternal truths. Elder David A. Bednar taught

this lesson succinctly when a young woman once asked him, “If you could give me only one piece of advice, what would it be?”

Without hesitation, Elder Bednar said, “Remember, it’s not about you.”⁶

The Book of Mormon missionary Ammon agreed: “Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things” (Alma 26:12).

My dear friends, we know the doctrine, but do we keep our focus where it should be when life gets really hard?

Kristen M. Oaks, the wife of President Dallin H. Oaks, taught:

*Each of us has felt moments of frustration, devastation, or limitation. That is part of our earth-life experience. How we react to those situations makes all the difference. Heavenly Father has blessed us with eternal perspective, and if we live worthy of it and trust in Him, that eternal perspective can ease the burdens of life.*⁷

A Righteous Mentor

What victory stories inspire you? Let me describe one hero and see how long it takes you to figure out who he is.

[He] was a strong and a mighty man; he was a man of a perfect understanding . . . ; a man whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country. . . .

. . . [His] heart did swell with thanksgiving to his God . . . ; [he was] a man who did labor exceedingly for the welfare and safety of his people.

. . . He was a man who was firm in the faith of Christ, and he had sworn . . . to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood. . . .

. . . His heart did glory . . . in doing good . . . , in keeping the commandments . . . and resisting iniquity. [Alma 48:11–13, 16]

Do you recognize Captain Moroni?

How would you like to be described as Moroni, who raised the title of liberty? When we think of his vision and courage, “our cheers will ring out.”

If all women and “all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto [add your name], behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men” (Alma 48:17).

Here is a big question: Who looks to you as a mentor? Have you thought much about that? I guarantee that somebody somewhere watches you and wants to be like you. You have more influence than you may realize. I pray that each of us can humbly follow the Lord and be righteous mentors as we hope to influence “alma mater’s sons and daughters” for good.

Building the Kingdom

“As we join in song, in praise of you, our faith is strong.” These words describe Floyd Johnson—a man of cheerfulness and great faith. Some people have very public influence. Floyd was an unsung hero. He worked as BYU’s Athletic Department equipment manager for forty-six years.

Floyd knew it wasn’t about him, and he wanted no recognition. He was a unique character—and so wise. Between washing and drying uniforms every day, he read the scriptures and scheduled devotionals throughout the Intermountain Area for athletes to share their experiences and testimonies with youth groups. Floyd’s focus in life was simply to build the kingdom!

He spent time with athletes of every religious background, answering questions and providing comfort. He continually invited others to learn more about the restored gospel, and many accepted his offer!

One of Floyd’s favorite stories reminds me of his gospel-sharing zeal. It was about two BYU football players who wanted to be better missionaries. One was a 260-pound defensive tackle and the other a 240-pound defensive end. In order to reach their goal, they were counseled to bear their testimony to somebody on the opposing team each week.

Many thoughts went into their “pigskin proselytizing” as they tried to devise a plan. Their next game was against the Air Force Academy,

and as they went through the first half, nothing happened. At halftime they reminded each other of their commitment. Late in the game, as the Air Force quarterback dropped back to pass, looking for a receiver, 260 pounds hit him, driving him to the ground. Then 240 pounds jumped on top of the pile. So there were 500 pounds of priesthood power on this little Air Force quarterback, and they were staring at him face mask to face mask.

The 260-pound player asked, "What do you know about the Mormon Church?"

The 240-pound player added, "Do you want to know more?"

This little quarterback looked up into those four big eyes and said, "Get off me. I'm a Mormon!"⁸

I can see Floyd's playful smile while telling this enjoyable story. Through his example we learned that one of the most important and fulfilling things we can do in life is to share the Restoration of the gospel with everyone. For some of us this might seem hard to do, but if we pray for faith and the courage to share, we, like Floyd, can find happiness as we bless those we reach.

We loved being with Floyd every day because of his positive influence. His down-to-earth authenticity created a safe place in which living the gospel felt comfortable and simple.

Vanquishing the Foe

I felt the same comfort and simplicity at a missionary meeting in Houston, Texas, several years ago. President M. Russell Ballard spoke straightforwardly to 650 missionaries, admonishing them to evaluate their lives and make necessary changes. Then he invited them to draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper. You may all want to do this. He told them to write at the top of one column "Things I need to stop doing in my life." At the top of the other column he told them to write "Things I want to improve in my life."

He then paused, looked at the group, and said, "Fix it!"⁹

What a way to "vanquish the foe." Can it be that uncomplicated? I say yes! Especially as we read and follow the inspired words of our leaders.

Living Epistles

I can't think of anyone who exemplifies the entire BYU fight song more than our new prophet, President Russell M. Nelson.

I love President Nelson! He is kind and cares deeply about each of us staying on the covenant path. He is the perfect example of one who never stops learning. I can testify of his keen understanding, insight, and desire to improve.

One interesting lesson he shared came from 2 Corinthians 3:2, where the apostle Paul taught, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men."

An epistle is a written document, but here Paul told us to *be* epistles. What did he mean? The scripture continues: "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ . . . written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3:3).

President Nelson admonishes us to be walking, living epistles of God in all we do.¹⁰

Be a Powerful Influence for Good

I attest that we are sending messages every moment through our words and actions. What messages are we sending? How are they being received? When people see us coming, do they gravitate to us or do they scatter in a great escape? I invite each of us to be a powerful influence for good. We have value. We have purpose. May we be the kind of living epistles our new prophet describes. As we do so, "we'll raise our colors high in the blue and cheer" not only "our Cougars of BYU" but also everyone we meet!

My dear friends and associates in this marvelous work, the BYU fight song teaches us lessons we can successfully incorporate into our daily lives:

- We can rise to greater heights, improving day by day.
- We can work "day or night," through "rain or snow," to challenge whatever foe threatens our eternal peace and happiness as we are "loyal, strong, and true" in everything we do.

- We can “join in song” and be cheerful and united as we spring into action, realizing that while it is not *about* us, it is *up* to us to become living epistles, sending positive messages to those we encounter.
- We can realize that while “the trail to fame and glory” is not of this world, it is our destiny as we obediently and humbly walk the covenant path back to our heavenly home—and the ultimate “vict’ry story.”
- We can realize that many of our “alma mater’s sons and daughters” are watching us and looking for praiseworthy role models to emulate—examples of strong faith who raise their colors high and cheer all that is uplifting and worthwhile.

Rah, rah, rah-rah-rah! We trust you! We respect you! We love you! Go, Cougars!

I witness that Jesus Christ is the living Savior of the world. I know that as the Only Begotten Son of our Heavenly Father, He leads His Church. I testify to you that Joseph Smith received an answer to his question in a grove of trees as the Father and the Son appeared to him. The Savior’s gospel has been restored in its fulness. The Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ. We are led by His prophets, seers, and revelators, with President Russell M. Nelson holding all the keys as our prophet today. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Marjorie Pay Hinckley, quoted in Virginia H. Pearce, ed., *Glimpses into the Life and Heart of Marjorie Pay Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 107; see also “At Home with the Hinckleys,” *Ensign*, October 2003.

2. “The Cougar Song,” Clyde D. Sandgren, words and music, 1932; copyright by his son, Clyde D. Sandgren Jr., 1947.

3. LaVell Edwards, quoted in Jeff Call, “Man for All Seasons,” *BYU Magazine* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 40.

4. See Brandon Gurney, “Timeline: LaVell Edwards Through the Years,” *Deseret News*, 29 December 2016.

5. “Priesthood Principles,” *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 2 (p. 8).

6. David A. Bednar, Area Presidency dinner, Auckland, New Zealand, 2015.

7. Kristen M. Oaks, *A Single Voice: The Unexpected Life Is No Less a Life* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 179.

8. See Floyd Johnson and Val Hale, *Touchdowns, Tip-Offs, and Testimonies: A Look at the Spiritual Side of BYU Athletics* (Orem, Utah: Alba Publishing, 1989), 40–46.

9. M. Russell Ballard, missionary meeting, Houston, Texas, 2013.

10. Russell M. Nelson, seminar for new mission presidents, June 2015.

The Cougar Song

Rise, all loyal Cougars, and hurl your challenge to the foe.

You will fight day or night, rain or snow.

Loyal, strong, and true,

Wear the white and blue.

While we sing, get set to spring.

Come on, Cougars, it’s up to you!

Chorus:

Oh! Rise and shout, the Cougars are out along the trail to fame and glory.

Rise and shout, our cheers will ring out as you unfold your vict’ry story.

On you go to vanquish the foe for alma mater’s sons and daughters.

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[Clyde D. Sandgren, words and music, 1932; copyright by his son, Clyde D. Sandgren Jr., 1947]