

Counsel for Students

DALLIN H. OAKS

My fellow students: I have spoken to BYU audiences on many occasions, but never on one like this. I am sorry that President Kimball is unable to speak to you today. He was with us in our meeting in the temple last Thursday. He expressed his love for each of us, as he always does. I know he would want me to express his love for each of you and his regret that he is not strong enough to address us at the beginning of this school year.

I am sorry that President Hinckley was unable to speak to you today. We all marvel at the way the Lord magnifies him to carry his great load. I am glad that by being here as his substitute I can do something to lighten that load.

I learned of this assignment only a week ago. I would normally prepare many weeks for such a major occasion as this. But short notice seems to be the emerging pattern of my life. I learned of my release as president of BYU about twenty-one hours before it was announced publicly. I learned of my calling to the Council of the Twelve about thirteen hours before it was announced. By comparison with those experiences, a week's notice of an invitation to talk to a friendly audience seems generous.

June and I are always thrilled to return to this campus. This is familiar ground, and we love it. Our nine years at BYU were happy years for us and for our family. We love this place and its wonderful people, new and old.

I may even presume that we are known to some of you. Our service at BYU makes us known to most of the faculty and staff. I may even be known to some of you students. While running some errands on campus last winter, I noticed a student looking at me quite intently. It took only about half a minute before he recognized me. I know he recognized me because he unfurrowed his brow and called out, "Now I know you. You're the guy on the old TV reruns of devotionals!"

This is the largest audience I have addressed in the five months since my calling to the Council of the Twelve. In that period many have wanted to know my feelings about this calling. With the encouragement of President Holland, I will begin by answering

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that question. My feelings were surprise, fright, gratitude, and resolution, in that order.

This calling was a stunning surprise to me. I was completely occupied and entirely happy in the professional work of a justice of the Utah Supreme Court. While I had a premonition that there would be one more large change in my professional life—that the Utah Supreme Court was not the last position in my working life—I had no inkling of my final destination or when I would reach it. I was also happy in my Church calling as gospel doctrine teacher in the Oak Hills First Ward, a position I had held for about eight months, following two years as the teacher of the sixteen-year-olds.

I was in Tucson, Arizona, on professional business when President Hinckley reached me by phone and notified me of my calling. Though surprised, I, of course, accepted immediately. Three other feelings followed in quick succession. All three remain with me to one degree or another.

My second reaction was fear, motivated by feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. Prior experience at BYU and as a Regional Representative made me aware of many of the responsibilities of members of the Twelve, and I shrank from thinking of myself in those terms. That feeling persists.

As I prayed and pondered the significance of this calling, I was also filled with gratitude that our Heavenly Father would call me to this position, where I can use my experience and spend all my time and talents for the rest of my life in, his service. I have had an unusual combination of professional and Church experiences. For many years I have felt a strong sense of stewardship in respect to those experiences. I have been convinced that I was being prepared for further service. Many times I prayed that when the time came, I would be able to recognize the work for which I had been prepared, and be able to be an instrument in the hands of the Lord in performing it. Now, with this calling, my prayers have been answered,

my course has been set for the rest of my life, and I am grateful.

Finally, I am resolved to serve God the Eternal Father and his son, Jesus Christ, whose special witness I am, with all my heart, might, mind, and strength.

I have much to learn and millions of miles to travel, but my surprise is over, my fear recedes, my gratitude increases, and my resolution is strong. That is how I feel about my calling.

I Bid You Welcome

The tradition of this university calls for the first devotional assembly of each school year to consist of a message of welcome and instruction from a leader of the Church. Consistent with that tradition, I bid you welcome. To the majority of you who are LDS, I give a reminder that you are supported by the tithes, love, loyalty, and prayers of over five million of your brothers and sisters, many of whom have desired to be in this place but have been unable to achieve that aspiration. To keep faith with those who pray for you and support you, look on your opportunities at BYU as a sacred stewardship. Conduct your studies and your personal lives accordingly.

To the hundreds of you who are not LDS, I extend a special welcome. We look on you as friends, as brothers and sisters. We anticipate that your presence here will enrich our education as well as yours. We invite you to take part in the active religious life of our campus wards and stakes. Or, if you choose, affiliate with a church or synagogue of your choice in this area. But by all means, have an active religious life while you are here, so that your college years will be times of spiritual as well as intellectual growth.

“This Quest of Truth”

It is appropriate to remind all BYU students of the importance The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints attaches to education. It is

important to say this, but it should be unnecessary. As you look at the facilities on this campus, as you consider the stature of the Latter-day Saints who have devoted their careers to scholarship and teaching at this university, and as you contemplate the tens of millions of dollars the Church appropriates to BYU each year, you know the importance we attach to education.

The acquisition of knowledge is a sacred activity, pleasing to our Father in Heaven and favored by him and his servants. Speaking on this campus about forty years ago, President J. Reuben Clark declared:

God made clear that the gaining of knowledge is not to be like the commonplace work of earning a livelihood. He who invades the domain of knowledge must approach it as Moses came to the burning bush; he stands on holy ground; he would acquire things sacred; he seeks to make his own the attributes of Deity, the truth which Christ declared he was (John 14:6), and which shall make us free (John 8:32). . . . We must come to this quest of truth—in all regions of human knowledge whatsoever, not only in reverence, but with a spirit of worship. [Remarks given at the inauguration of BYU President Howard S. McDonald, 14 November 1945 (Inauguration Speeches, BYU Archives)]

That is why we choose to pursue learning in a special setting, with explicit standards of conduct and appearance for students and teachers alike. Those standards, the BYU Code of Honor and the dress and grooming standards, are an essential part of the educational mission of BYU. All students and all BYU personnel are explicitly committed to observe them.

Strive for Personal Worthiness

In the remainder of this message I will offer some suggestions to help students in the coming year, and, indeed, for all the years ahead. My text is the word of the Lord given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1832 in connection

with the commandment to build the Kirtland Temple and to initiate the Church's earliest effort in formal education, the School of the Prophets. This is section 88, verse 124, of the Doctrine and Covenants:

Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.

Consider these ideas in order:

1. Cease to be idle. Here is a familiar and basic command. Your parents probably sent you off with the same advice: "Work hard." I read in the *Daily Universe* that President Holland gave you the same advice last week.

I know of no better words of advice on the subject of ceasing to be idle than to "work first and play after." The discipline of forcing oneself to work first, until the job is completed—whether it be a daily assignment, a term paper, or other needed task—and only then to enjoy the pleasure of play, is a master secret of life. It bears immediate fruits in accomplishment, but its most important effects are long-range. In following this priority we learn self-discipline, which unlocks the door to undreamed-of accomplishments.

How do you spend your time? Are you the master of your time, or do others control it by flicking the switch on a television or by impromptu invitations to pleasures or diversions that you have no willpower to resist? Work first and play after.

2. Cease to be unclean. One of the most distinctive characteristics of Brigham Young University is our proud affirmation that character and morality are more important than learning. As I have already noted, we consider personal worthiness an essential ingredient of our educational enterprise. That educational philosophy was revealed by God, and we will follow it faithfully and without apology.

Our concern with personal worthiness stems from our knowledge that we learn best when we are in harmony with the commandments of him who is the source of all truth. By this means we can have the companionship of the Holy Ghost, the great teacher whose mission is to testify of Christ, to guide us into all truth, and to bring all things to our remembrance (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13). But to receive and retain that assistance, we must keep the commandments of God. And we must be clean.

In his various messages to BYU students, President Kimball has always stressed personal worthiness, and he has usually warned against sexual impurity, the abuse of the sacred procreative powers which God has given and which he has commanded be reserved for marriage relations between man and woman. “Be ye clean,” the Lord has commanded. As you enter a new year of opportunities, we cannot ignore the fact that it is also a new year of temptations. Again, I say, as the prophets have said, be ye clean! The Holy Spirit will not dwell in us if we are not.

Sin drives out the Spirit of the Lord. When the Spirit departs, the lamp of learning flickers, and the special illumination available from the Holy Ghost is gone. This is one of those eternal principles that you can verify by immediate personal experience. Recall a time when you were resentful or quarrelsome or angry or filled with hate. Could you study effectively? Could you think clearly? Did you receive any enlightenment during that period?

Anger and sin darken the mind. They produce a condition in men and women that is the opposite of the light and truth that characterize the word intelligence, which is the glory of God. Repentance, which can cleanse us from sin through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, is therefore an essential step along the path of learning for all who seek light and truth through the teaching power of the Holy Ghost.

In section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord gives this great promise, which clearly ties the enlightenment of the mind to personal worthiness: And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bod[y] shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things” (D&C 88:67).

This is the ideal toward which we strive, but none of us measures up completely. None of us is perfect. Though our desires are good, we are all capable of foolish omissions and self-destructive acts. We all have need of repentance. At some time in our lives, each of us needs help in getting over what someone has called “Fool’s Hill.” The steep forward slope of Fool’s Hill represents the foolishness and self-centeredness of boys and girls, but its summit and farther side, once attained, afford the wider unselfish perspective of men and women. I hope you are, or soon will be, over Fool’s Hill, with the maturity to glimpse the wider vistas beyond.

3. Cease to find fault one with another.

What does this commandment have to do with learning? Doesn’t the process of learning involve the kind of faultfinding involved in questioning old ideas and old ways? Don’t we seek illumination in the crucible of colliding ideas?

But the Lord has said, “Live together in love” (D&C 42:45), and “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). The Savior taught the people of the Book of Mormon:

For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away. [3 Nephi 11:29–30]

We should shun the spirit of contention, and do away with our tendency to be scornful of others or the efforts of others. As it says in Proverbs, if we eliminate scorn, “contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease” (Proverbs 22:10).

We can have disagreements on facts or theories or policies or administration without finding fault with those who hold another view. We can differ with dignity and without rancor or faultfinding. If we differ in this manner, we can retain the Spirit as our teacher. This is a valuable lesson. Learn and practice it, and you will be blessed. “Blessed are the meek,” the Savior taught, “for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

4. Cease to sleep longer than is needful.

Oh, there’s a sermon for the first class after lunch, for evening school, for early morning, or for any other time or season! Let us repeat what follows that injunction in the Doctrine and Covenants, for it is never more essential than for young people of your age and your activity:

... cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies, and your minds may be invigorated.

I stress again the promise with which this verse ends, which I believe relates to all four of its subjects—idleness, uncleanliness, faultfinding, and sleep habits: “*that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.*” If you desire that blessing, look well to the four commandments on which it is predicated.

As I conclude this thought, I repeat again the Lord’s commandment to his servants who were establishing the School of the Prophets. It is applicable to all students at all times and in all places:

Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer

than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated. [D&C 88:124]

Be Hungry to Learn

And now, two additional thoughts in closing. Both concern priorities and attitudes in learning.

In order to be successful in pursuing an education at BYU, you should be hungry to learn. In order to obtain a good education, one that will increase your joy and enlarge your capacity to serve your family, your community, and your profession, seek learning for the sake of learning. Do not limit yourself to a grudging compliance with minimum requirements of attendance, assignments, and degrees. Pursue learning for the purpose implied in the motto of this university—“The Glory of God Is Intelligence.”

A learned person is an enemy to ignorance, and there is so much ignorance in the world. People by and large lack literacy in the vital subjects of general education: in clarity of thought and expression, in economics, history, and government; in nutrition, health, ethics, and education; in law and medicine; in knowledge of God and his commandments. We are too easily victimized by quacks and demagogues, by preachers of false doctrine, by rain-makers, panacea-peddlers, and political and other practitioners of the cults of something-for-nothing and get-rich-quick. A learned Latter-day Saint should seek and be able to evaluate answers to the important religious, physical, social, and political problems of the day. He or she should be prepared to defend the truth, to withstand social pressures, and to make a positive contribution to society.

President Kimball expressed our high aspirations for the students and graduates of BYU in a prayer he offered in this place almost a decade ago. He was dedicating the lovely carillon bell tower, whose music accompanied our steps to this assembly. That tower was a gift

from the alumni to the university on its hundredth anniversary. President Kimball's words of dedication are at one time a compliment and a challenge to all who attend this university:

We thank thee for this institution and what it has meant in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and their posterity, for the truths they have learned here, for the characters that have been built, for the families which have been strengthened here. . . .

*Just as these bells will lift the hearts of the hearers when they hear the hymns and anthems played to thy glory, let the morality of the graduates of this University provide the music of hope for the inhabitants of this planet. [Spencer W. Kimball, Dedication of the BYU Carillon Tower, *Second Century Address* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), p. 12]*

Drink of the Living Water

I conclude with the most important thought of all. It concerns priorities in learning and doing.

During his journey across Samaria, Jesus rested at Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and he asked her for a drink. When she marveled that a Jew would speak to a Samaritan, he told her that if she knew who he was, she would ask him for living water. Seeing that he had no implement to draw water from the deep well, she asked Jesus how he could obtain any water to give her.

Before we remind ourselves of his answer, we should note how this incident is similar to our present circumstance. The Savior is in our midst, sometimes personally, frequently through his servants, and always by his Spirit. His power is such that he could obtain anything on this earth. He need not ask for water at the well or for tithes and offerings at the Church, or for work at the welfare farm. He asks us for these temporal things, just as he sought a drink from the woman at Jacob's well,

so he can bless us with something of far greater importance to us than what we give.

In answer to the Samaritan woman's question of how he could give her living water without any way to draw it from the well, Jesus answered:

Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. [John 4:13–14]

As you begin a new school year, it is appropriate to think of your education as an implement that can draw water from the well. We need such an implement; we encourage great personal sacrifice and the Church expends large resources to aid students in acquiring it. You can use the implement of education to satisfy earthly desires for yourself and those who are or will be dependent upon you. On occasion, your education can also be used to provide earthly support for the Savior and his work and his servants.

But while we are spending great efforts to acquire knowledge of earthly things—of things in the earth and under the earth, and so forth (D&C 88:79)—we must never forget what the Savior told the Samaritan woman: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall never thirst again." Only from Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of this world, can we obtain the living water whose partaker shall never thirst again, in whom it will be "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Jesus taught us how to obtain that living water. The teaching he gave the Samaritan woman reminds us, even as we are involved in acquiring implements to draw water from wells of earthly skills and knowledge, that what we obtain from Jacob's well gives only temporary relief. The water of Jacob's well—however significant in satisfying temporary earthly desires—is insignificant in value beside what

we can obtain from Jesus' words and from his atoning sacrifice. This is the most important message I urge you to remember on this day, during this year, and throughout your life.

God lives. Jesus Christ is his Only Begotten Son. He has restored the gospel in this latter day. Joseph Smith saw God the Father and his

son Jesus Christ, and the Prophet's successors have presided over this Church to the present day when we are guided by a living prophet, Spencer W. Kimball. I bear you that testimony and ask the blessings of the Lord to be upon you in this school year and throughout your lives, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.