

Perspectives on Change

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In my devotional address today I am going to take the dangerous tack of speaking on a subject that everyone in the audience is already thoroughly familiar with and may even dislike. I am going to talk about change and offer a few perspectives on coping with change as individuals and as a university community. Since I am a librarian, some of you probably came today expecting me to talk about books—and so I will, but perhaps not in the context you anticipated.

When I say that everyone in the audience is already familiar with change, I am referring to what each of us experiences as the natural consequence of aging, although the experience is quite different for young people than it is for those in later stages of life. For example, a teenager looks forward to aging as an exciting adventure during which he or she will mature into a man or a woman and be entrusted with new responsibilities like driving, dating, and holding down a part-time job. The young adult looks forward to leaving the protective confines of the family to serve a mission or attend school. Those in their early twenties discover the difference between attraction and love, make eternal covenants in the temple, and then begin families of their own.

So many changes come so quickly for young people, and yet for them time seems

to move very, very slowly. This is partially because in our youth we dream extravagantly and anticipate eagerly the progress of our lives. Aging before 25 is like being aboard a roller coaster slowly climbing up toward its first exhilarating peak. The majority of the ride still lies in front of us as an unknown adventure.

Unfortunately, the metaphor of the roller coaster rings true for aging after 25 as well. After 25, life rushes forward at blinding speeds with unexpected twists and turns that threaten to throw us off the track. Some of the ride is exciting, some of it is disappointing, and other parts are positively nauseating. And as the roller coaster speeds toward the conclusion of the journey, the car in which we are riding gets more and more rickety. After 30, the physical consequences of aging, the increasingly routine but hectic pace of our lives, and the growing weight of family and job responsibilities can leave us fearing change and longing for an earlier and seemingly more carefree time of life.

However, the inescapable truth is that whether we welcome change or dread it,

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change will occur. Understanding this, how can we cope with those changes that are so stressful? In answer to this question, I would like to offer a short story—a parable if you will.

The Caterpillar and the Butterfly

Here is my version of the parable of the caterpillar and the butterfly:

There were once two caterpillars, one brown and one green, who lived in the same tree and became extremely close friends. Each morning they would find each other and then settle down on a large leaf where they could eat and talk throughout the day. Munching on leaves in the cool shade of the tree, they were as happy as two friends could possibly be.

Then one morning the brown caterpillar awoke to find his friend missing. He crawled frantically from one branch to another looking for the green caterpillar, but his friend was simply nowhere to be found. Sad and lonely, the brown caterpillar finally gave up his search and selected a leaf to eat for breakfast. The next day and the day following that, the brown caterpillar spent each morning looking for his friend but with no success. Gradually he forgot about the green caterpillar altogether.

Then, one late afternoon just as the sun was setting, a beautiful butterfly landed on the same leaf where the caterpillar was resting. The caterpillar had, of course, seen butterflies before, but he had never been so close to one of these beautiful creatures. He couldn't help but contrast the delicate body and wings of the butterfly with his own thick and clumsy appearance. To his surprise, the butterfly spoke to him.

"Oh, it's so good to see you again, old friend!" said the butterfly.

"What?" responded the caterpillar in surprise. "Are you talking to me?"

"Well, of course I am," responded the butterfly. "Don't you recognize me?"

The caterpillar, puzzled and embarrassed, said: "I'm sorry, but I really don't remember

having met you before. Perhaps you're mistaking me for someone else."

"No, there is no mistake," said the butterfly, "but I suppose that I have changed a lot and so I shouldn't be surprised that you don't recognize me anymore. I was once a green caterpillar, and you and I spent many days together in this very tree."

Looking at the beautiful butterfly, the caterpillar was astonished and asked, "You were once my friend the green caterpillar? But how could that be? How could a caterpillar become a butterfly? That seems impossible."

"Well, it wasn't easy," admitted the butterfly, "but when I was a caterpillar I always believed that I had the power to change if I really wanted to. And to tell you the truth, changing into a butterfly wasn't even the hardest part. The hardest part was giving up being a caterpillar." (See also Trina Paulus, *Hope for the Flowers* [New York: Paulist Press, 1972].)

Personal Change and the Plan of Salvation

From the gospel perspective this short story offers several important messages. First, change should not be viewed as a harsh and unrelenting enemy in our life because it is, instead, a necessary part of the plan of salvation. The opportunity to change is the great gift of our Savior, and endeavoring to change must be our lifetime's work. The reward after years of struggling to change will be a transformation more complete and wonderful than that of the caterpillar becoming a butterfly. Our transformation will be the affirmative answer to Alma's question:

And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?
[Alma 5:14]

Our reward after a lifetime of struggling to be obedient to eternal laws will be to receive in

our hearts and in our faces the image of Him who never changes, our Savior Jesus Christ.

Another important message from the story can be found in the butterfly's observation about changing: the hardest part is giving up being a caterpillar. The hardest part of changing for you and me is giving up who we are today. Each of us harbors in a dark corner of his or her life weaknesses with which we have become so comfortable that they now seem to be a natural part of us. And they may be, for, as Alma warns, the natural man is "carnal, sensual, and devilish" (Alma 42:10). A caterpillar becomes a butterfly by being true to its nature; change is possible for us only by overcoming our nature. The secret of our transformation lies not in genetic coding but in the power of a free agent to act for him- or herself—choosing good over evil in the hour of temptation, choosing to respond to anger or mistreatment with love, choosing to serve when service is inconvenient.

A last message from the caterpillar story is that in order to be transformed, we must endure experiences that are very, very difficult. It cannot be otherwise. I believe I can best illustrate this point by describing my experience as a parent. All of my children are grown now, and I am tremendously proud of each one of them and love them with all of my heart. But I can still remember clearly and painfully those turbulent teenage years during which my sons and daughter were struggling toward maturity. Like all young people, they faced many temptations and occasionally made decisions that disappointed me—sometimes terrified me.

I can still remember wandering around the house late at night, unable to sleep because of worry and frustration. I recall pleading with my Father in Heaven to change my children's attitudes and alter their behavior. From my perspective at the time my prayers seemed unanswered, because after a night on my knees, the next morning my kids were still the same teenagers. It was a frustrating, anxiety-

ridden period of my life. My faith didn't waver, but my endurance was sometimes poor.

Over time, however, each child emerged from the trials of youth to become a responsible adult committed to keeping eternal covenants. And with the passing of time—seemingly the passing of a great storm—I have been able to look back and come to three important realizations:

First, there were times that I can clearly identify now that my Father in Heaven did intercede in the lives of my children to protect them from harm. Today I have an absolute testimony that our Father in Heaven answers prayers and that He is a God of miracles.

Second, the temptations and trials that my children experienced were a necessary part of their progress within the plan of salvation. It was never within my power nor according to my Father in Heaven's will for me to protect my children from having to make difficult choices. It is only by making those choices that any of us experience the mighty change of heart.

Third, during my children's teenage years I was in need of refining change more than they were. I have come to understand that it was only in the middle of anxiety-ridden nights that I began to love my children as much as my Savior does and that I caught a small glimpse of what it will mean to be a parent in the eternities. I have come to believe that it was in the middle of the night when I was praying for one of my children, with my heart filled with love for them, even though their behavior had disappointed me, that I began to comprehend my Savior's love for me and His extraordinary patience.

I was impatient for my children to become perfect in a short four- or five-year period of their lives whereas my Savior has been waiting half of a lifetime for me to become perfect in observing my covenants. How often has He yearned for me—and how often has He yearned for you—to overcome whatever it is that holds us back from experiencing more

fully the transforming power of His Atonement. For as we are told in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Change and the University Community

I would like now to shift my focus away from the need for personal change and offer a perspective on change relative to our university. I have worked at BYU for almost 28 years. I love this school and am committed to its mission. In many respects I feel that every year at BYU is critical because every year a new group of young men and women come here seeking to strengthen their testimonies and gain an education. I have a growing sense, however, that we now are entering a particularly crucial period when our employees and our students may be required to face new challenges and reach for new opportunities.

Because I am a librarian, the most effective way I have of introducing my perspective on these new challenges and opportunities is to talk about the library. Our library is one of the nation’s finest, a remarkable repository of knowledge and human expression. In our collections are 4,000-year-old clay tablets, papyrus more than 1,000 years old, manuscript books produced in monasteries over 600 years ago, and printed books from the great epochs of the Renaissance and the Reformation. All of these works—whether composed of cuneiform symbols in clay or of ink and gold leaf on vellum or of printed text on paper—have survived for hundreds of years to enable great men and women of the past to speak, in Moroni’s words, as voices “out of the dust” to the students of BYU today (Moroni 10:27).

Also well preserved in our library’s collections are books from the age of the Enlightenment and from the centuries that followed—the periods during which Europe and America were shaped by the Industrial Revolution and by new ideas about self-governance and reli-

gious freedom. In his fascinating work *Books That Changed the World*, Robert Downs observes that it was during these centuries that the idea of progress was linked to scientific discovery and technological innovation. Increasingly it was believed that science and technology could overcome all of the world’s problems.

Evidence of the great accomplishments, as well as the unintended consequences of this reliance on technology, can be found in our library. For example, a new paper-manufacturing process introduced during the 19th century to meet the growing demand for books left the pages of those books filled with acid. Today, many works of the 19th century are turning to dust on library shelves around the world, literally silencing their authors.

The invention of the camera and sound-recording devices during the 19th and early 20th centuries made it possible to preserve not only written text but also the sights and sounds of progress. The media produced by these recording devices, however, have proven to be no more durable than acid paper. For example, a photograph must be stored in the dark and at near freezing temperatures in order to survive much more than 100 years without deteriorating.

During just the last few decades of the 20th century, enormous strides were made in the ability to record and store large volumes of text, images, and sound in digital formats. Increased emphasis was also placed on the capacity to deliver this information across high-speed networks, leading ultimately to the birth of the Internet and the World Wide Web. I can illustrate quickly the enormous potential of these developments from a library perspective.

I hold here one volume of Emmeline B. Wells’ handwritten diary. Sister Wells’ diary begins in 1847, when she was 18 years of age and joining the pioneer trek as they exited Nauvoo and headed across the West. The diary continues into the 20th century, when Sister Wells served as the general Relief Society president of the Church. Her diary is an inspiring

record of a lifetime of faith and courage that is made freely available to any student, faculty member, or other researcher interested in the history of the Church. Because of the age and fragile nature of the diary, however, the library is somewhat cautious about how frequently it is used, and the diary cannot, of course, be taken out of Special Collections.

This CD-ROM contains a digital reproduction of Sister Well's diary and a typescript as well of each volume's text that is somewhat easier to read than the original handwriting. The digital versions on this CD-ROM will be made Web accessible so that they can be read by anyone connected to the Internet anywhere in the world, any time of the day or night. Our library is now digitally reformatting about 59 other pioneer diaries that will also be made available on the Web. Libraries throughout the world are engaged in digitizing their unique collections, which include diaries, photographs, musical recordings, and even television footage. With this global effort underway, and given enough time and goodwill, there is the real possibility that the unique holdings of every research library in the world, including our library at BYU, could become the common property of students and scholars everywhere.

With such possibilities before us, it is no wonder that many are proclaiming that we have entered a new era: the information age. Some suggest that this age will transform our world much like the Industrial Revolution did earlier. There are some dangers, however, that threaten this vision of the future. They are embedded in the very technology that makes digital libraries possible.

One of these dangers is that the media for storing digital records is remarkably fragile—far more fragile in fact than acid paper or photographs. For example, we can't be certain how long the digital version of Sister Wells' diary will survive on this CD-ROM, but it will certainly be less than 100 years—possibly less than 50. Of even greater concern is the viability

of the computer hardware and software required to read the CD-ROM. Given the rapid evolution of computer technology, I suspect that CD-ROM hardware and software could be obsolete and no longer available within 20 years.

And it isn't only libraries that worry about the danger of relying on rapidly changing technology. In a recent issue of *Time* magazine dedicated to the future of technology, Stewart Brand observed that some technologies have now become self-accelerating, meaning that one generation of advance, such as a new computer chip, will be used to design its own replacement. According to Brand, self-accelerating technologies

create conditions that are unstable, unpredictable and unreliable. And since these particular . . . technologies drive whole sectors of society, there is a risk that civilization itself may become unstable, unpredictable and unreliable. [Stewart Brand, "Is Technology Moving Too Fast?" *Time*, 19 June 2000, 108]

Taking a related point of view in an article for the *Futurist*, Stephen Bertman notes that it has been 30 years since Alvin Toffler first warned in his book *Future Shock* of the psychological and biological dangers of exposing people to "too much change in too short a time." Yet during those 30 years the rate of technological and social change in our world has increased dramatically. In Bertman's opinion, we are fast approaching a rate of social change that, in his words, "can warp our behavior and our most basic values even as it desensitizes us to the metamorphosis" (Stephen Bertman, "Hyperculture: The Human Cost of Speed," *The Futurist* 32, no. 9 [December 1998]: 20). The issue of *Time* I mentioned earlier contains a shocking example of Bertman's point. In that issue an article by Joel Stein explores, without apology, the hope for technology to improve the quality of pornography (Joel Stein, "Will Cybersex Be Better Than Real Sex?" *Time*, 19 June 2000, 62–64).

With Bertman’s warning in mind, we have to wonder whether the information age, with all of its astounding scientific advances, will be the precursor to a new period of enlightenment during which the benefits of education will spread over the face of the earth, or will the information era usher in a new dark age during which society surrenders its ethical and moral standards in the pursuit of entertainment and pleasure. The answer is, of course, that change will occur in both directions. From a personal perspective, whether we use new technology for self-enlightenment or self-indulgence is a matter of choice, the very choice to which I referred earlier in this talk.

I believe that from a university perspective, the information age may open new opportunities for BYU to fulfill its mission more effectively than ever before. Remember that the university’s mission “is to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life.” And “to succeed in this mission the university must provide an environment enlightened by living prophets and sustained by those moral virtues which characterize the life and teachings of the Son of God” (*The Mission of Brigham Young University*, 4 November 1981, 1). Of all the great institutions of higher education in the world, BYU and the other CES schools are unique in espousing this mission, being guided by living prophets.

Our prophet today, Gordon B. Hinckley, addressed a number of questions relative to BYU in the priesthood session of the October 1999 general conference. Speaking about the limitation on how many students can be accommodated on our Provo campus, President Hinckley said:

If we cannot give to all, let us give to as many as we can. The number who can be accommodated on campus is finite, but the influence of the university is infinite. Tremendous efforts are being made to enlarge and extend that influence. [Gordon B. Hinckley, “Why We Do Some of the Things We Do,” *Ensign*, November 1999, 52]

During our 1999 Annual University Conference, President Merrill J. Bateman announced four institutional objectives for the university, the third of which was to “Extend the blessings of learning to members of the Church in all parts of the world” (“From Pioneer Roots to a World-Class, Worldwide Institution,” Brigham Young University, 23 August 1999, 10; at http://speeches.byu.edu/auc/99AUC_Bateman.pdf).

In the library, we will work to increase BYU’s influence and extend the blessings of learning by using new technologies to make available those materials that support education and testify of eternal truths—materials like the diaries of our pioneer ancestors. In a world where the Internet is all but overwhelmed by trivia and pornography, our library’s contribution will be to make available materials of enduring value. I am confident that BYU’s faculty will use technology to further new modes of teaching that will both improve the quality of education on our campus and make education more broadly accessible to young people throughout the world. The unique contribution of our faculty will be to make secular learning available within the light of the restored gospel.

I believe that the impact of BYU on a world in danger of losing its ethical and moral foundations will be inestimable. Progress should never be measured in terms of scientific and technological advancement but only in terms of the human condition. The solutions to mankind’s problems will be found by applying gospel principles, not through technology. I also believe that extending BYU’s influence will be one of the most complex and difficult tasks ever undertaken at the university. It will require that every employee search for ways of performing his or her assignment more effectively, including using new technology. And it may be that as we seek to change the way we work we will need to remember the observation of the butterfly: the most difficult part of changing is giving up being a caterpillar.

A Challenge to BYU Students

In the few minutes remaining, I would like to offer one more perspective on change for the students of the university by relating an experience from the life of my grandmother, Thelma Bean Waddoups. My grandmother grew up in the small Idaho town of Herbert. About 20 miles south of Rexburg, Herbert consisted of nothing more than widely separated farmhouses—typically log cabins—and two town buildings. One of the town buildings was the post office. The other served as a one-room schoolhouse from Monday through Friday, as a dance hall on Saturday, and as an LDS meetinghouse on Sunday.

My great-grandfather, Charles Bean, was a man of tremendous imagination and industry who did whatever was required to support his wife and children. At this point in his life, Charlie Bean was homesteading new farmland with the hope of improving his family's living circumstances. In 1910 my grandmother Thelma began school in Herbert at the age of six. Since transportation near the turn of the century was limited to riding a horse, driving a buggy, or walking, she typically walked the two miles to and from her schoolhouse.

The schoolteacher sold Bibles as a part-time job. In hopes of motivating his students, he offered to give one of his Bibles at Christmas-time to the child who had the best attendance record and the best grades. In a poor Idaho farm community in 1910, it would have been a magnificent thing for a young child to own a book of her own, particularly if the book were the Bible. Thelma determined that the Bible would be hers, even though she was much younger than most of the other children in the school.

That fall, in the small isolated town of Herbert, she attended school without missing a day. Those of you familiar with the weather around Rexburg will be more impressed by the accomplishment of this young girl who walked four miles a day during the storms of November

and December. Excited by the opportunity of learning, Thelma found that she was naturally a good student. By applying herself, she earned the best grades in the school. As Christmas approached, she was confident that the coveted Bible would be hers.

Finally, when the day arrived for the teacher to award his prize, my great-grandparents were reluctant to let Thelma make the journey to school. There had been a particularly severe storm the night before, and the snow was so deep that it was nearly impossible for a man or a horse to travel. However, the crust on the snow was firm enough that a small girl could walk on top without falling through. And so my great-grandfather had the choice of either letting his young daughter make the journey alone or keeping her home—undoubtedly causing her to lose the Bible. He finally conceded to let her try it on her own, and my great-grandmother, Agnes Leatham Bean, sat by the window and watched her daughter with a spyglass for as long as she was in sight.

After a long, cold journey, little Thelma eventually arrived safely at school, eager to receive her reward. When the time came, however, the teacher told her that even though she had the best attendance record and the highest grades in school, he had decided not to give the Bible to her because a young girl her age couldn't read well enough nor fully appreciate the scriptures. The teacher gave the prize to another student.

As you can imagine, Thelma made the long journey home through the snow that day in tears. It seemed that all of her walking and all of her studying had earned her nothing. Great-grandfather Bean was overwhelmed with pity for his daughter, and even though he, like most farmers of that time, had almost no cash, he scraped together enough to buy my grandmother a Bible—from her teacher, no less—for Christmas. It was this Bible that she has kept to this day and passed down to our family as a testimony

of how important the scriptures of our Lord are and how hard we must work to earn them.

In the many years that followed, my grandmother lived to watch on television as a man walked on the moon. She endured two world wars and raised a family during the Great Depression. With no more than a high school education from Ricks, she became the registrar for Utah State University and sat in councils with deans and university presidents. Having hardly ventured out of Idaho as a girl, she served missions with my grandfather in Canada and New Zealand. I believe that through this life of enormous change, she was sustained by the physical, emotional, and spiritual strength she gained as a young girl walking through the snow to school in pursuit of the word of God.

It seems likely, given the pace of our world today, that virtually every student in this audience will experience more change during their lifetime than my grandmother has during hers. How you react to those changes will determine

whether you view your life as an ever-expanding set of opportunities or a never-ending series of disappointments. The choice will be yours.

If, like my grandmother, you set high expectations for yourself and work with energy and discipline toward achieving those goals, then you will be transformed into a person that you can scarcely imagine today. If, like her, your guiding desire is to obtain the word of God, then, even though you experience some disappointments in life, your Father in Heaven will make up the difference. Now is the time, while you are a student at BYU, to develop the physical, emotional, and spiritual strength that will sustain you through all of the changes to come. I testify to you that your Father in Heaven is aware of your desires for the future and your struggles to become more obedient. I testify to you that your Father in Heaven loves you and that His spirit will strive with you always, and I bear this testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.