

# *Enlightened, Uplifted, and Changed*

KEVIN J WORTHEN

**D**uring his final address as principal of Brigham Young Academy, Karl G. Maeser gave this wise counsel:

*There are two periods in a man's labors when circumstances seem to dictate . . . the advisability of making as few words as possible: they are at the beginning and at the end of his work.<sup>1</sup>*

George Washington apparently shared the same sentiment, as his second inaugural address consisted of only 135 words.<sup>2</sup>

Following the example of these outstanding leaders, I will be relatively brief. I emphasize “relatively” because I am, by training, a lawyer—one of a group of people who often speak as if they were paid by the word. So don’t expect me to match Washington’s brevity. I want you to get your money’s worth.

Let me begin with expressions of appreciation, starting with my wife, Peggy, who has not only stood by my side but has also often propped me up as we have shared so many wonderful adventures these past thirty-six years. I think it is safe to say that she did not envision that we would ever be in this position when she agreed to marry me. But no one has

been more supportive or had more impact on my success than has she.

I also express appreciation to the members of the board of trustees, whose confidence in me bolsters my own confidence. We are truly blessed to be led by inspired men and women whose lives of consecration and service provide such clear examples of what we hope our students become.

Finally, I thank those who have sacrificed so much to make BYU the outstanding university that it is, including especially the twelve individuals who have preceded me as leaders of this institution. I am particularly indebted to the past five—Presidents Oaks, Holland, Lee, Bateman, and Samuelson—each of whom has had a profound impact not only on this university but also on me personally. I will never feel comfortable being considered in the same category as these remarkable men, but I will always feel grateful for the extraordinary institutional leadership and personal mentoring they have provided.

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*Kevin J Worthen was the president of Brigham Young University when this address was delivered at his inauguration on 9 September 2014.*

As a result of the efforts of these outstanding leaders and the prophets who have guided them through the decades, the direction of Brigham Young University is firmly set. It is clearly stated in our mission statement. We are “to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life” by providing “a period of intensive learning” that includes not just “the arts, letters, and sciences” but also “the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

What some consider to be a dubious effort to demonstrate “that faith in the Almighty can accompany and enrich scholarship in the secular” is, as President Gordon B. Hinckley observed, “more than an experiment [at BYU]. It is an accomplishment.”<sup>4</sup> We have posted our colors to that mast and are fully committed to that cause with a faculty and student body who are better prepared than ever to achieve that goal.

Given the clear direction provided by our mission statement, the question for us is how we can best move this important work forward at this time. My answer is simple: by going to the mountains.

One of the first things that many visitors to this university notice is the presence of the majestic mountains that rise dramatically to the east of our campus. The program and posters for this inauguration contain a painting of one of those mountains—Y Mountain, as it is known. A rendering of that mountain is also on the back side of the medallion that was just placed around my neck. I chose that particular feature as a kind of personal symbol for my tenure as president. I did so in part because of the iconic block Y on that mountain. As I explained to the faculty, staff, and administration at our recent annual university conference, the block Y can remind us of the unique education that we are to provide to our students—one that is broad, deep, spiritual, and character building. But the large block Y is only part of the reason I chose Y Mountain as a symbol. I also chose it because it is a

mountain. And mountains are good symbols of the kind of educational process that I hope occurs here.

The link between education and mountains was observed by Henry David Thoreau more than 150 years ago. After spending time in the mountains near Williams College in western Massachusetts, Thoreau stated:

*It would be no small advantage if every college were . . . located at the base of a mountain, as good at least as one well-endowed professorship. . . . Some will remember, no doubt, not only that they went to the college, but that they went to the mountain.*<sup>5</sup>

Thoreau’s observation was not just a plea to include physical activity as part of a well-rounded curriculum. For Thoreau, mountains were places where people could be “elevated and . . . etherealized.”<sup>6</sup> *Etherealize* is not a word we use often. It means “to refine, exalt, or spiritualize (something).”<sup>7</sup> Mountains are thus locations where people can be enlightened, uplifted, and changed.

The learning process to which we are committed should do the same. It should be education that elevates and etherealizes. That doesn’t exactly roll off the tongue, so I don’t expect it to catch on as a phrase here. But it describes well the kind of education I hope we provide at Brigham Young University in the coming years, and I hope the mountains that surround us will be reminders of that aspiration.

The general pattern for this type of learning process can be seen by reviewing what the scriptures teach about the role mountain settings play in God’s interaction with His children.

First, mountains are places of instruction—places to learn new things. It was on the mountain that Nephi received instruction on how to build a ship,<sup>8</sup> a task he had never engaged in previously. And the brother of Jared came to understand new ways of lighting ships while “upon the top of the mount.”<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, our classrooms, labs, offices, and other settings in which learning occurs must be places of instruction at the highest level. Students and faculty alike should ascend high enough in their disciplines to think new thoughts and to find new ways to make things better.

That will require strenuous effort. As President James E. Faust observed when addressing law students:

*Do not expect your professor . . . to concentrate his lessons out of the scriptures, although occasionally he may wish to do so. His obligation is to teach you the secular rules of . . . law. . . . Your obligation is to learn the rules of law. . . . The whisperings of the Holy Spirit will no doubt help you, but you must learn the rules . . . using Churchill's phrase, by "blood, sweat, and tears."*<sup>10</sup>

You see, climbing mountains is hard work.

Second, mountains are places of spiritual communication and revelation. On more than one occasion the Savior went to the mountain to pray, including before He called His apostles.<sup>11</sup> The grand revelation in which God provided "an account of this earth, and the inhabitants thereof"<sup>12</sup> to Moses was given "in the mount."<sup>13</sup> Spiritual insights often come in mountain settings.

In like manner, we must go to the mountains spiritually if we are to obtain an elevated and ethereal education. It is not enough to gain learning by study; we must also live our lives in such a way that we—both students and faculty—are able to receive inspiration directly from God. That requires adherence to both the spirit and letter of the Honor Code—which was designed not just to distinguish us from other universities but to prepare us for elevated forms of learning.

Finally, mountains are places of transfiguration—places where individuals are transformed and changed in significant ways. Moses was visibly different after he had

spoken with the Lord in the mountain.<sup>14</sup> And one elevated place in the Holy Land is known as the Mount of Transfiguration because of the increased light that emanated from the Savior's countenance when He ascended there with some of His apostles.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, the education we provide here should change the students in significant ways. In the long run, the learning process will not be complete unless it becomes ingrained in their character, unless it becomes part of who they are. We need to provide an education that allows our students not just to learn new things and to experience spiritual insights but to become different, better people—to be etherealized, if you will.

So that is the kind of education we aspire to provide: the type of life-changing education that can take an inexperienced and insecure young man from the coal mines of Carbon County—whose sole and futile aspiration growing up was to be a pro basketball player and who never dreamed of being a university professor—and prepare that kind of individual intellectually and spiritually to become, by some unlikely miracle, the president of one of the greatest universities in America. Elevated and etherealized indeed.

It is no coincidence that Brigham Young University was established in this mountain location. It is a partial fulfillment of prophecy proclaimed by Isaiah more than 2,500 years ago. Speaking at the inauguration of President Dallin H. Oaks, President Harold B. Lee stated:

*Brigham Young University, led by its president, must never forget its role in bringing to reality the ancient prophecy—to build the mountain of the Lord's house in the tops of the mountains, so great and so glorious that all nations may come to this place and be constrained to say, "Show us your way that we may walk therein." (See Isaiah 2:2–3.)*<sup>16</sup>

As we ascend to the tops of the mountains in these ways as a university, we will discover

that new peaks lie ahead. As imposing as Y Mountain may seem from its base, it is not the tallest mountain to the east of campus. As you reach the summit of that mountain, you realize there are higher mountains behind it. And so it is for us. As we elevate ourselves intellectually, spiritually, and in character-building ways, we will encounter new and exciting challenges and opportunities that we have not seen before. As President Spencer W. Kimball explained some thirty years ago:

*It should be obvious to us all that the ultimate future of BYU is partially hidden from our immediate view. Until we have climbed the hills just ahead, we cannot glimpse what lies beyond. And the hills ahead are higher than we think. We cannot be transported over them without meeting demanding challenges. . . . You will not always be able to see the future, but by drawing close to our Heavenly Father, you will be guided.<sup>17</sup>*

So, to the mountains we go. The climb will be challenging, but it will also be exhilarating, elevating, and, yes, ethereal. May we move ever upward in that endeavor is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Karl G. Maeser, “Final Address” (4 January 1892), *The Normal* 1, no. 10 (15 January 1892): 82.

2. See “George Washington’s Second Inaugural Address: The Shortest Inaugural Address in History,” [history1900s.about.com/od/uspresidents/qt/washspeech.htm](http://history1900s.about.com/od/uspresidents/qt/washspeech.htm).

3. *The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* (Provo: BYU, 2014), 1, 2.

4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Remarks at the Inauguration of President Cecil O. Samuelson,” BYU devotional address, 9 September 2003.

5. Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), “Tuesday.”

6. Henry David Thoreau, *Journal* (1906), 12 September 1851.

7. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “etherealize,” [oed.com/view/Entry/64734?redirectedFrom=etherealize](http://oed.com/view/Entry/64734?redirectedFrom=etherealize).

8. See 1 Nephi 17:7–10; also 1 Nephi 18:1–3.

9. Ether 3:1; see also verses 1–6.

10. James E. Faust, “The Study and Practice of the Laws of Men in Light of the Laws of God,” *Clark Memorandum* (fall 1988): 18–19; also in *Life in the Law: Answering God’s Interrogatories*, Galen L. Fletcher and Jane H. Wise, eds. (Provo: J. Reuben Clark Law Society, BYU Law School, 2002), 37.

11. See Luke 6:12–13; Mark 6:46; Matthew 14:23; John 6:15.

12. Moses 1:35.

13. Moses 1:42.

14. See Exodus 34:29.

15. See Matthew 17:1–2.

16. Harold B. Lee, “Installation of and Charge to the President,” in *Addresses Delivered at the Inauguration of Dallin Harris Oaks*, 12 November 1971, 12; quoted in Merrill J. Bateman, “From Pioneer Roots to a World-Class, Worldwide Institution,” BYU annual university conference address, 23 August 1999.

17. Spencer W. Kimball, “Installation of and Charge to the President,” in *Inaugural Addresses*, 14 November 1980, Brigham Young University, 10.