

The Demands of Discipleship

JEFFREY R. AND PATRICIA T. HOLLAND

Welcome to Brigham Young University, home of the famous Thistle Lake Marine Biology Station and Independent Student Newspaper Capital of the World! My name is Jeff Holland, and this is my wife, Pat. We deliver pizza, type term papers, coordinate family home evening groups, and play the national anthem every morning—Pat on the saxophone and I on the accordeon. In our spare time we do outside consulting on Ninth East road repairs. Of course, when we grow weary and need to get away from it all, we hide out in the Harold B. Lee Library, usually in the classics section. We have found that students are reluctant to venture in there.

As a matter of fact Pat and I have been wondering how we might get you to study just a little more than you do. We wondered if, on the eve of another football season, this approach might help:

Jeff: Hello, everybody! I'm Jeff Jackson, your play-by-play announcer. Welcome to the thrills and excitement of big-time college instruction! The Academic Broadcasting Network and the National Collegiate Academic Association are proud to bring you this live broadcast of another great college lecture. Today's lecture is a classic featuring Professor Hugh Nibley of Brigham Young University.

Professor Nibley has a long tradition of success and currently ranks second in the nation in total verbiage. Helping to analyze and providing the color commentary for today's lecture will be my highly respected analyst, Patty Poindexter. Patty, how do you see today's lecture?

Patty: Well, Jeff, the atmosphere is charged with anticipation, and the conditions are perfect for a great lecture. The classroom is well-lit, the temperature is about 74 degrees, the desks are arranged, and the chalkboard has been erased and washed. I just don't see how conditions could be any better for a great lecture.

Jeff: Patty, you mentioned the desk formation. Professor Nibley seems to have arranged the desks in a semicircle facing the lectern. That is a brilliant stroke! What are your thoughts on that kind of formation?

Patty: Jeff, Professor Nibley has been using that formation for several years. He is truly one of the great innovators and strategists in the

Jeffrey R. Holland, president of BYU, and his wife, Patricia T. Holland, delivered this devotional address on September 13, 1983.

conference. We are in for some kind of afternoon!

Jeff: Thanks, Patty. We'll have prelecture interviews with the professor and with some of the students in just a minute, but first let's take time out for this message from the National Collegiate Academic Association.

The NCAA is proud of the academic accomplishments of the many students who participate in sanctioned lectures throughout the United States.

Though most of the national attention and publicity is focused on academics, the NCAA reminds our listening audience that many of the same students who excel in the classroom are also fine athletes in the academic off-season. The National Collegiate Academic Association salutes these fine students who also find time to participate in athletics and who may become the quarterbacks of tomorrow when their competitive academic careers are completed. Back now to live action with Patty and Professor Nibley.

Patty: Professor Nibley, how have you prepared for today's big lecture?

Jeff: Patty, we're going to stick with what has worked for us all season. This far into the academics semester, one dare not make any radical changes. So this past week I've concentrated on enunciation, voice inflection, transitions, and summaries. You might see a new wrinkle or two in there today, though.

Patty: Professor, your record certainly speaks for itself. If my memory is correct, you lead the league in surprising transitions. Just one more question: What do you see as the deciding factor in today's lecture?

Jeff: Patty, it's always important to be sound in the fundamentals. Content, delivery, and practical application are important, but the deciding factor today will be errors—grammatical errors. One can drill and drill on eliminating grammatical errors, but when one faces the pressure of an actual classroom situation, it's awfully difficult to predict what will happen.

Patty: Okay, Professor, best of luck to you.

Jeff: Thanks, Patty. There's the bell! The lecture is over! What an exciting finish! Patty, your thoughts on today's exciting lecture?

Patty: Jeff, it was awesome! The transitions were powerful. The overheads were clear. The summary was a thing of beauty. He avoided prepositions at the end of sentences, and his voice inflection and gestures were excellent. It's easy to see why the professor ranks nationally in the top ten.

I see that we have Professor Nibley with us now. Professor, how do you feel about your performance today?

Jeff: Patty, I'm really glad this one is over. There was a lot of pressure in that classroom today, but I thought the kids gave a great effort for the entire fifty minutes.

Patty: Professor, what was going through your mind when you asked that thought-provoking question midway through the period, and no one seemed to have an answer?

Jeff: I died a thousand deaths, but I knew those kids would come through because they have a lot of heart. This class really showed me something today!

Patty: They surely did. Every student in the room took notes and fielded questions with a lot of pride and determination. What about the prospects for the rest of the semester?

Jeff: Things look good at this point. I think we're rolling now, and I've already started reviewing notes for next week's lectures. We're all looking forward to the big showdown, which, of course, is finals week. That's where we'll be playing for all the marbles. Our task now is to maintain this kind of momentum.

Patty: Right, Professor, and of course Jeff and I will be there covering all the action. Congratulations to you on another great lecture, and good luck to you and the students as you push towards finals. (Adapted from Robert G. Simpson, "Are We Overemphasizing Academics?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 1982, pp. 182–183)

Well, enough of such nonsense. We will now be pleased to hear from Sister Holland.

Patricia T. Holland

I know, as you all return to school, many of you are anxious and filled with some apprehension. I can understand that. From my small-town experience twenty years ago BYU seemed like a world beyond my reach. I just knew I would never be as bright or as popular or as fashionable or as successful as other students coming to the university. I was convinced I just couldn't compete! After twenty years I now plead with you: Please don't do that to yourself!

Though you may have some of the same fears we all have, may I urge you not to limit your growth because of a sense of excessive competition with others. We all know people who say, "I'm only going to do what I do well because I don't want to fall short," and when that is an ambition for superiority over others, we feel doubly inadequate when we fail.

Develop the courage to be imperfect while eagerly continuing your search for perfection. I use the word *courage* because it does take a great deal of strength to accept oneself as less than perfect while still seeing oneself as a person of genuine value. One must accept oneself as he or she is—good enough at *this* moment—in order to have confidence to move on.

May I tell you a story about Barbara D. Lockhart, shared with me by my friend and hers, Carolyn Rasmus. Barbara is a member of our faith who, in 1960 at the age of seventeen, was named to the Olympic speed-skating team. Of her race against the Russians she wrote:

The day of the 3000 meters was beautiful, and I was ready. The announcer called number 32, United States of America. My heart was pounding, and goose bumps rose up on top of goose bumps as I proudly came forward in my red, white, and blue,

representing the USA. When the starter shot the gun you would have thought he shot me! I took off as if doing a 500 meter instead of a 3000, quickly settling into my stride and keeping up a very fast tempo. My feet felt as if they were barely touching the ice. I was flying! All those years of training and technique work all came together—every muscle, every move, my mind, body, and spirit all were working in total harmony. I could hear the crowd cheering—and then suddenly, I was shooting across the ice toward the crowd. As I was coming into the last lap, my feet slipped out from under me, and down I went. I scrambled back to my feet, back into my stride and did finish ahead of my pair. But I lost about 14 seconds and slipped from a possible second place to twenty-second in the standing.

Immediately after the race, I skated over to Klara Nestorova, a Soviet skater, who stood with tears steaming down her cheeks. She was in third place at the time I skated and, had I stayed on my feet, she would not have received an Olympic medal. [Although she was weeping in my behalf, I did not feel sorry for myself.] I felt elation, joy, excitement because I had skated so much better than I ever imagined I could—it was truly a peak experience. I knew I had done the very best I could do. People said to me, "All that work for nothing." [But I say] can you imagine competing in the Olympics, traveling the world over, making close friendships with people from other cultures, enjoying the fitness and health, the lessons learned from years of discipline, focused effort, persevering, failing, and trying again? Can you call that nothing? [I did not win the gold or the silver or even the bronze that day] but I was a winner! Many times in life no one else will be there to declare that you are a winner—that will have to come from within—when you recognize that you have done your very best at the moment! [Barbara D. Lockhart, "Aspire to Excellence," talk delivered at Wilmington Delaware Stake Conference for Women, 16 April 1983]

Barbara Lockhart was a winner that day because she was competing only with herself.

When you can finally learn to set your own goals, you don't spend time comparing yourself with the rest of the world, and you control your own sense of self-worth! When we tie our view of ourselves to beating others, we may trap ourselves into "winning at any cost." Excessive competition can result in cheating for high grades, bending rules for personal gain, and destroying compassion and kindness and forgiveness and love in our immodest—and sometimes immoral—quest for the top.

Of course there is a righteous motivation—from within, not without—that does encourage us to be the best we can. That inner striving comes from the Holy Spirit urging us to fulfill the very measure of our own personal, individual creation. It should be comforting to remember we each have a specific mission in life unlike any other.

President Kimball has said:

Remember, in the world before we came here, faithful women were given certain assignments while faithful men were foreordained to certain priesthood tasks. . . . You are accountable for those things which long ago were expected of you just as those we sustain as prophets and apostles! ["The Role of Righteous Women," Ensign, November 1979, p. 102]

May this be your most successful year ever, success achieved for the right reasons with the right motives leading to the right accomplishments. In that spirit we welcome you back to school. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jeffrey R. Holland

Just ten years ago this last summer we were newly back in Utah following graduate work in New England. We were living in Salt Lake City and were anxious to have our two children enjoy some of the community opportunities provided there. Our son Matt, then seven, wanted to participate in the summer tennis program offered in our neighborhood so we

got him started. After about three days of instruction and practice he was ecstatic. He had the U.S. Open clearly in hand and was taking a very serious look at Wimbledon.

"Dad," he shouted, "I just love tennis. And I'm pretty darned good. And tomorrow—tomorrow they are going to put the net up!"

I wish to speak to you this morning about life with the net up. I will focus on what I think that means here at BYU, now, for this chapter of your life. But I believe the principles are true and universal. I think they will matter wherever you go and whatever you do—this year or any other year of your life. As with the net on a tennis court, the meaning, the significance, the accomplishment—indeed the fun—of your opportunity here depends on the discipline with which you stroke the BYU ball. You must hit it high enough and hard enough to clear the net, but it also has to be controlled—disciplined, if you will—to stay in bounds for the point. And, as Sister Holland has so beautifully suggested, your only real opponent is yourself. You are learning to play the game well, enthusiastically, skillfully, and your enjoyment increases with practice. I wish to speak of just three aspects of the discipline and control needed to be successful at BYU.

"Take Pride in Your Principles"

The most important discipline of all is that which you impose on yourself, that which is a function of your own will and your own integrity. When your choice reinforces the university's choices we unleash the highest possibilities for our collective experience here. We want you to be free in the very best gospel sense of freedom, free "to act and not be acted upon," as Lehi teaches in the Book of Mormon. The greatest opportunity will come when you agree at the beginning of this or any school year on what your personal goals are and how, with discipline, they can be achieved within the framework of the institution's goals.

I mentioned Thistle Lake, which was rather quickly formed up Spanish Fork Canyon last spring. A long time ago President George Brimhall, third president of BYU, made this application for the new students of BYU shortly after the turn of the twentieth century.

"Years ago," he wrote,

I was driving a buggy up Spanish Fork canyon. By my side sat my boy. A freight train came thundering along, and we speeded up the team for the purpose of enjoying the company of the great moving mass. The boy spoke up, saying, "Pa, look. There's a fellow going two directions at the same time." And sure enough, there was a man on top of the train, running to the rear. He was running west and the train was carrying him east.

The lad had heard me say that people could not go in two directions at the same time, and here was evidence against my assertion. I said, "Well, what is going to happen?" The boy replied, "Well, he will have to stop or be dumped off."

*The man did stop and both he and the train sped on but it left a lesson with us. That warning might be given to you students. "Don't run in a direction opposite to that of our school, or you will be dumped off." The direction of the institution is toward the rising sun, the direction of a better school, a bigger school; those who remain with it must be in the direction of the bigger, better students. Lives of double direction are short and disastrous. [George H. Brimhall, *Long and Short Range Arrows* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1934), pp. 40–41]*

That was three-quarters of a century ago, but we are still interested in trying to have that bigger, better school. The school's very first president, Karl G. Maeser, repeatedly asked that first generation of BYU students to "be yourself, but always your better self." That is the kind of freedom I want for you and for the university as a whole. I want us all to move toward the rising sun. Don't spend your time wondering whether you are on the right train.

It is the right train, and we need every one of you for the journey.

At the start of each school year I find it necessary to speak of our Code of Honor and the significant "net" that it puts up for our time together. Notice that I refer to the Code of Honor, not simply dress and grooming standards. The latter are in some ways the *least* of the elements in a Code of Honor that addresses far more important issues of honesty, integrity, and virtuous Christian living. Nevertheless I am again forced to say something on the subject of dress and grooming this morning as one part of that code. Many of you have recently come from high school or home areas where styles, fashions, and behaviors ebb and flow in response to fads. In many cases, those fashions are not compatible with the pledge you made regarding your dress and appearance while attending BYU. This discrepancy has been apparent among a few of you this past week, especially at our dances. Some of the inappropriate fads are represented by "punk rock," "new wave," and "flashdance" appearance. These are expressions in the extreme and are not welcome nor acceptable for BYU students, whether those activities be on or off campus. And we really should not have to remind anyone that shorts, bare-midriffed blouses, tube tops, and the like, are simply not worn on the BYU campus. We have just seen too much immodest dress here this fall.

Almost all of you are doing wonderfully well. Ninety-nine percent look magnificent. And I know all will understand our concern for even a few who do not yet understand our hopes here. Please be clean and modest and disciplined in your behavior. Without being offensive, share our hopes with those few who might not be fully aware of our expectations. I will leave this subject with a thought from President Kimball: "[These guidelines] were not designed to create dissension or make you unhappy or angry. . . . Your clothes do not have to be new . . . , but they should be clean,

modest, and neat. Be dignified in your outward appearance . . . and in your inward morality. Take pride in your principles” (“On My Honor,” 1978 Devotional Speeches of the Year [Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1979], pp. 134–35).

But as I said, matters of external appearance are ancillary to the greater concerns of the Honor Code, which each of us pledges to uphold in coming here. I have already quoted two former presidents of the university. May I quote a third? My immediate predecessor, Dallin H. Oaks, may, as a justice of the Utah Supreme Court, now feel even more strongly about honesty than he did when he spoke from this podium more than a decade ago:

In speaking upon the subject of honesty and truthfulness I am keenly aware that most of our BYU students are honest and truthful, fulfilling the commandments to the best of their ability. But there are many who need reminding. . . .

It is dishonest to write a check with insufficient funds in the bank to cover the check. The check, being a false representation of fact, is a lie. It is also a crime and deserves to be treated that way.

It is also dishonest to obtain merchandise on credit, [including the use of] a credit card, without knowing how you will pay the debt. At an aggravated level, when the individual, upon contracting a debt, has no intention of paying it, his obtaining merchandise by this means is the crime of obtaining property under false pretenses.

Similarly, it is dishonest for a student to run up a bill for rent, telephone services, [television equipment,] or other obligations, and then skip out, leaving roommates to carry the burden. It is dishonest to make a long-distance call and charge it to a nonexistent number. It is also dishonest and fraudulent to use the telephone to send [coded] messages that do not result in fair charges on the telephone bill. . . .

Whenever I hear persons argue that [these are] only “little [sins],” I think of the criminal who approaches an employee and asked, “Would you help me steal your employer’s property if I paid you

one million dollars?” After a moment of thought, the surprised employee said that he supposed he would, for one million dollars. The criminal replied: “Well, I [can only] give you twenty dollars [right now, but] let’s get started.”

The employee angrily replied, “What do you take me for, a thief?”

“We have already established [what you are],” the criminal responded; “now we are just haggling over the price [of your services].”

“The qualities of honesty and truthfulness,” President Oaks concludes,

*are the foundation of all organizations and all personal relationships. . . . How much trust would you place in a person who told you the truth ninety-five percent of the time? How much value is an employee who does not steal from his employer — ninety-five percent of the time? The ninety-five percenter is like a leaky bucket: the hole may be small, but it renders the entire vessel unworthy of its purpose. Unless the hole can be mended, the bucket is bound for the trash heap. [Dallin H. Oaks, “Be Honest in All Behavior,” *Speeches of the Year* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1972–73), pp. 85–88, 95]*

Be honest in class and out, this year and always. Don’t cheat. Don’t plagiarize. Don’t steal. Be decent and virtuous and true. If we can’t teach that here, none of the other lessons matter. To paraphrase President McKay, no carefully combed head of hair can compensate for failure in the soul.

“Use It or Lose It”

May I move quickly to another form of discipline. The word *discipline* comes from the Latin *disciplina* which means “teaching or learning” and the root for that is *discipulus* which means *pupil*. Thus we speak of the various academic disciplines of the university and of the faculty and students who pursue them.

The court in which you have come to play and the contest you have chosen to undertake

is that of Latter-day Saint higher education. This is a university, and you are invited to immerse yourself in developing your learning, and your love for learning, here. I have said before that there are less expensive ways to hold young adult conferences. Furthermore we could help you get dates, watch ball games, and stand in various and sundry lines without building and staffing what I believe to be the finest university in the world. You come here today as BYU students have for over a hundred years, committed to the proposition that “the glory of God is intelligence” (D&C 93:36) and that “whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection” (D&C 130:18). We come to the university above all to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

Study as if your life depended on it, for surely in the most important ways it does. You will have paid too much of your own and others’ money if you do not take away from here the very best education we can provide you. Resist the temptation to idle your way through. Study first and then relax, when you can be more honorable and less troubled in doing so. *Discipline. Discipulus. Pupil.* Discipline your mind and your will and your habits. Set a course for yourself now that will make you successful in every private and public endeavor you pursue for the rest of your life. Get up in the morning and go to bed at night, not vice versa. Work hard. Go the extra mile along the remarkable pathway that is so generously provided you here. See the meaning now and avoid the lamentations later. I could be an independently wealthy man if I had a dollar for every freshman who wasted his first year, even in so noble a cause as waiting for a mission call. Far, far too many return to the university only to learn that like the great mark of the beast recorded in the book of Revelation, those D’s and E’s are forever inscribed on the forehead of their official academic transcript. Make every opportunity count—every class, every

semester. Attend our forum and devotional series. They are some of the rarest opportunities BYU can afford, untried and unafforded at any other university in the country. As with every privilege we need to “use it or lose it.”

There are treasures to find at BYU that may well never be our privilege to pursue again once we leave here. These include “great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures,” to quote scripture, and it is your privilege to seek them out and claim them as your own.

With any luck you will, along with Barbara Sorensen Stoutner, even learn to love botany.

Teach me that in mitosis are two replications of chromosomes and in meiosis only one.

Teach me that there is secondary growth in dicotyledons but not in monocotyledons because monocotyledons do not have cambium.

Teach me that I can get a grade symbolizing a knowledge of botany if I study two hours out of class for every hour in.

Teach me that if I endure the semester, I can graduate and never have to know about botany.

Teach me to marvel at the intricate difference between meiosis and mitosis.

Teach me to wonder in awe how a majestic tree developed from a tiny seed containing two cotyledons.

Teach me to know in humility that all of the textbooks of men cannot reveal the secrets contained in a tiny blade of grass.

Teach me to love botany, and a lifetime’s search for knowledge will not be able to quench the thirst you created.

[Barbara Sorensen Stoutner, “Teach Me To Love Botany,” *Ensign*, July 1983, p. 7]

“If Ye Have Love One to Another”

I conclude with the most important discipline of all, connecting and converging and conveying the many meanings of all our other disciplines. I speak of discipleship, our

devotion to the Father and Son and the gospel they brought, for it is the gospel of Jesus Christ which gives all ultimate meaning to the nets and controls and boundaries that mark the dimensions of the court on which we improve ourselves.

Every year as school starts, I worry through the days and nights, praying you will be safe and happy and successful. We want you to have friends and to feel welcome and to feel loved. And we want you to understand that only you can provide those guarantees to each other. In a world which has some strife and stress and disappointment, we will never have too much friendship or too many arms extended to bear us up and lead us forward. When Christ came to his final days with his disciples, he summarized all that he had said to them in one great reminder, fearing perhaps that when their own disappointments came or when pressures would increase, they might not be able to recall every commandment on every scroll and every teaching from every discourse. He then said, as if there were but one way to remember it all,

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciple, if ye have love one to another. [John 13:34–35]

The brotherly and sisterly expression of that love is the ultimate test of our loyalty to him. It is our highest form of discipline.

All of us have seen this special miracle work again and again, whether that be in our own lives, in the lives of our family, or in the lives of those with whom we've shared some experience. I remember vividly the dreadful circumstance into which a young lady had managed to fall several years ago. She was not a BYU student but was a Latter-day Saint, and yet her very life seemed to be disintegrating before our eyes. As a result of trying to play

with the net down, trying to live without rules and without restraint, she was experiencing the moral and spiritual stupefaction of a broken marriage, illicit moral behavior, dark drug abuse, and finally physical violence. She was descending into a personal hell from which no one seemed to be able to retrieve her and from which she personally did not have the wish or the will to turn away.

Her mother and others who had great concern for her had been in contact with me. Her Church leaders had tried to help. All seemed to no avail. The weeks became months, and human life unraveled before our eyes.

Then something happened. A lifelong friend of this young woman contacted her and tried, with love, to open her eyes and touch her heart. When neither her eyes nor her heart seemed to be yielding, this friend, this sister in the family of God who understood Paul's reminder that when one member suffers all suffer with it, grabbed the lapels of her friend's heavy winter coat and shook it with all her might. She shook her with all the strength her 105 pounds could muster, and, sobbing, she said through her tears, "Look at yourself. Don't you see what you are becoming? Look at yourself! I can't stand it anymore. I love you, and you're breaking my heart." At that she let go of the lapels of the big heavy coat and with tears streaming from her eyes turned and ran away.

The young lady whose life was in such jeopardy later recalled for me her response to that encounter. She said, "I don't know exactly what happened in that moment. Perhaps I am not likely ever to know. I had been talked to by many people, and little of it had meant anything to me. But if I live to be a hundred, I will never forget what I saw with my eyes and heard with my ears as this my childhood friend looked at me with utter anguish and screamed into my soul, "I love you, and you are breaking my heart."

Today that girl is the beautiful, happy, safe, and productive young woman which she once

had been and which surely God meant her to be. She has been remarkably successful in a graduate program at a very good university. She is fully active in the Church, and she is devoted to a life of responsibility and respectability—all because someone in her own way said at the right time and with the right intent that whatever disappointments there had been, these two were forever sisters and disciples of Christ. That stunning declaration not only changed a life, but it quite literally saved this one. We need such brothers and sisters nearby us.

We also need a Father in Heaven who stays by us in our times of necessity and fear. A great Christian writer once said, “God whispers to

us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world” (C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), chapter 6, p. 81). We may find in our lives that God’s love for us may also require a good firm grasp on our lapels.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). May God bless us with controlled and disciplined lives during this coming year while we learn and grow and love together. This is a wonderful time in your life and this is a wonderful place to be. Good luck, with the net up, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.