

“The Meek Will He Guide in Judgment: and the Meek Will He Teach His Way”

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When I began my academic career, I received a lot of counsel—some helpful and some not so helpful—from more senior colleagues. Suggestions were offered relative to teaching style and practices; interacting with administrators; navigating the university system for purchasing, travel, computer facilities, space, parking, etc.; involving myself in my professional organization; networking with my national disciplinary colleagues; getting my research started; and so on. While most of the counsel was welcome and beneficial, I remember very little of it today.

However, one curious suggestion made by a colleague elsewhere, who was just a few years my senior, has never left me. Very shortly after I joined the faculty at BYU, he pulled me aside at a professional conference and recommended that I start what he called my “AIG” file. Seeing the confusion on my face, he explained wryly, “‘AIG’ stands for ‘Ain’t I Great.’” My colleague suggested I keep the file in a handy drawer in my desk and that I add to the file any evidence, no matter how trivial, that would prove my professional distinction. He explained that the file might contain a positive letter from the editor of a prestigious journal or publisher, a note from a student

explaining a life-changing classroom experience, documentation of changes made after attending a teaching seminar, and clippings from a local newspaper covering a research finding. This file, my colleague explained, would be used as ammunition for tenure and promotion, fodder for nominations for university and national awards, and leverage in salary negotiations or for positioning myself for job offers elsewhere—and to just generally build my ego.

My colleague’s suggestion sounds extreme—perhaps even embarrassing—to most, but the fact is, we are in a profession that encourages this kind of thinking. We all know colleagues, hopefully in faculty appointments elsewhere, who seem to excel at self-promotion. Arrogance is an occupational hazard of the academy—and unsurprisingly so. Captive student audiences hang on our every word, and this can encourage in us a “know-it-all” mentality. We seek to lead and shape our disciplines with our scholarly contributions,

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and we hope for the attendant admiration of our disciplinary peers. There is sometimes the inclination to view access to resources and attention as a competition. Some expect the admiration of departmental colleagues, at the same time interacting with incivility and intolerance of opposing viewpoints. Scholars profess their work through writing, presuming someone will read their work and find it as groundbreaking as they themselves do. Indeed, the very title “Professor” carries with it stature and prestige that can be intoxicating. If we are not watchful, all of this can lead to an inflated view of ourselves and can create a culture of conceit.

This brings us naturally to the theme of this university conference: “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way” (Psalm 25:9). Despite the rather unflattering image of the academy I have drawn to this point, I am persuaded that our colleagues here understand and practice the declaration given in this simple couplet by the Psalmist. It is the meek who have access to heaven’s instruction and guidance. The centrality of meekness in our spiritual growth, indeed our salvation, has been taught repeatedly, perhaps most often in the form of caution to avoid its opposite—pride.

We recall President Ezra Taft Benson’s landmark 1989 general conference talk “Beware of Pride” (*Ensign*, May 1989, 4–7). This topic was revisited in President Dieter F. Uchtdorf’s 2010 general conference address (“Pride and the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, November 2010, 55–58). Both speakers have defined and taught eloquently about the spiritually corrosive nature of pride.

Although we at BYU understand the intimate coupling between the sacred and the secular, it is not my intention today to attempt to add to what prophets have taught. Rather, I hope to show today why meekness might be critical in a university environment. I wish to explore the indispensable nature of meekness,

or humility, to our optimal functioning as teacher-scholars. I acknowledge that there may be definitional and etymological differences between these two words—*meekness* and *humility*. However, many fine dictionaries list the two as synonyms, and I will use them interchangeably today.

It is helpful at the outset to define what meekness is *not*. Rather than virtues to aspire to, humility and meekness have often been seen as signs of weakness. This is reflected in the dismissive and sometimes sarcastic tone, often humorous, with which humility is sometimes treated by the successful. Media mogul Ted Turner once quipped, “If I only had a little humility, I would be perfect” (quoted in Steve Cady, “A Brash Captain Courageous: Robert Edward Turner 3d,” *New York Times*, 19 September 1977, 60). And pioneering architect Frank Lloyd Wright noted, “Early in life I had to choose between honest arrogance and hypocritical humility. I chose honest arrogance and have seen no occasion to change” (quoted in Herbert Austin Jacobs, *Frank Lloyd Wright: America’s Greatest Architect* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965], 19).

By contrast, note the following thoughtful observation from John Ruskin, the 19th-century art critic, social thinker, and philanthropist:

*I believe the first test of a truly great man is his humility. I do not mean, by humility, doubt of his own power, or hesitation in speaking of his opinions; but a right understanding of the relation between what he can do and say, and the rest of the world’s sayings and doings. [“Of Modern Landscape,” *Modern Painters*, vol. III (1856), part IV, chapter 16; emphasis in original]*

The topic of meekness and humility may seem unusual for a gathering of accomplished professionals—you whom we encourage to excel, to profoundly influence malleable students, and to rise to the top of your disciplines.

I believe this underlines the common misconceptions many have about the role of humility. What I have studied has persuaded me that humility and professional accomplishment are not mutually exclusive but, rather, are mutually reinforcing. I am confident that we will not reach our potential as faculty and as a university *without* this virtue.

Principally in the last decade and a half, behavioral and organizational science scholars have explored the dimensions and impact of humility in both individuals and institutions. Those studies have sought to measure it, identify its origins, characterize its impact, and study its development. We have colleagues at BYU who have contributed to this research, and I will draw some from their work today.

As I have reviewed the related literature, I have found it interesting, as is so often the case, that these scholars' observations and conclusions, "discovered" so recently, have been known and taught by prophets for millennia. While these inspired teachings are critical to the salvation of mankind, this prophetic perspective has even greater importance to us, given Brigham Young University's mission and aims. Elder Neal A. Maxwell described in 1975:

*Moderns elsewhere may, with anguish and clarity, use art to describe the dark and anguished human condition at forty fathoms in the sea of sin, but BYU, in the dispersing of its talents, seeks to add to the light rather than further describe the darkness, and the latter is a style that, unfortunately, is becoming normative. ["Why a University in the Kingdom?" *Ensign*, October 1975, 8]*

Our annual university conference theme declares "the meek will he teach his way," which mandates the sifting of God's children to identify and reward only those who are meek enough to receive heaven's instruction. It was the Book of Mormon prophet Moroni who taught:

And again, behold I say unto you that he cannot have faith and hope, save he shall be meek, and lowly of heart. . . .

. . . For none is acceptable before God, save the meek . . . ; and if a man be meek . . . , he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing. [Moroni 7:43–44]

Thus meekness is prerequisite to charity, and as described so beautifully and metaphorically by the apostle Paul, charity (and, I will add, meekness, its antecedent virtue) "suffereth long, . . . envieth not; . . . vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up . . . , seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, [and] rejoiceth in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:4–6). This is in sharp contrast to the culture of conceit that I earlier suggested can be the norm in our profession.

The multiple published studies in the behavioral and organizational sciences literature relating to humility have described three principal dimensions. For the remainder of my remarks today I wish to discuss each of these three, hoping to illustrate just how central humility is to Brigham Young University's progress in reaching its prophetic destiny.

Accurate View of Oneself

The first of the many dimensions of humility has been described by Professor June Price Tangney—a social psychologist at George Mason University and a pioneer in the field—as the ability and the willingness to see oneself accurately, including both strengths and weaknesses, neither unduly favorably nor unduly unfavorably (see "Humility: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Findings and Directions for Future Research," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 19, no. 1 [spring 2000]: 70–82; and "Humility," in C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, eds., *Handbook of Positive Psychology* [London: Oxford University Press, 2002], 411–19). Ralph W. Sockman, noted Protestant preacher and author of books

on Christian life, described this dimension this way:

True humility is intelligent self-respect which keeps us from thinking too highly or too meanly of ourselves. . . . It makes us modest by reminding us how far we have come short of what we can be. ["Humility Cited as Leading Virtue," *A Lift for Living, Louisiana Methodist* 13, no. 31 (10 August 1961): 7]

The meek are capable of inspecting themselves objectively and are willing to do so, unafraid of what they will discover. Most of us are happy to recognize and have others recognize our own strengths. It takes the truly meek to look inside, individually and institutionally, and seek to openly characterize where we are. Such a characterization can only be done if we have a template for who we want to be, a target for who we want to become, and metrics by which to measure ourselves. We at BYU have the benefit of an inspired board of trustees to provide such a template for us. Without this defined objective we are destined to drift. Alice's request for directions of the Cheshire Cat as she made her way through Wonderland is instructive:

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where—" said Alice.

*"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat. [Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition* (New York: Norton, 2000), 65]*

Having a destination in our quest for great degree programs and a great university is vital. This is the reason for departmental strategic plans, regular academic unit reviews, the rank and status policy, documented department expectations for teaching and scholarship, annual stewardship interviews, and so

on. It is easy to meet the standard one has created after the work is done. It is much more difficult to develop an ideal and then seek to reach it at the risk of falling short.

Self-study is a term we use frequently at the university—one that sometimes brings panic because of the work required and the fear of what might surface. An effective self-study requires meekness and the humility to define where we want to go at the risk of having to admit we are not there yet, what steps are required to get there, and how to track our progress. President Thomas S. Monson has said:

When we deal in generalities, we will never have a success; but as we deal in specifics, we will rarely have a failure. ["The Aaronic Priesthood Pathway," *Ensign*, November 1984, 43]

President Monson also liked to quote:

When performance is measured, performance improves. When performance is measured and reported, the rate of improvement accelerates. [In "Thou Art a Teacher Come from God," *Improvement Era*, December 1970, 101]

We must quickly acknowledge that not all that is important to us is measurable. But isn't such self-inspection the predecessor of improvement—a nondefensive look at oneself to identify both progress and potential? Dare I say, isn't this *assessment*?

The university hosts 141 different academic programs accredited by twenty-six different specialized accreditors. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities is the accrediting body for the university as a whole. Under Northwest guidelines we define our mission and objectives and propose metrics that we will use to gauge our progress. This involves the creation of university, program, and course outcomes—what we hope to achieve in the relatively brief time we have

influence on students. This process involves formulating direct and indirect measures to gauge our achievement of those outcomes. Finally, the expectation is that having defined outcomes and having measured our effectiveness in achieving them using the various metrics we have put in place, we will then analyze the results and modify our methods in areas where we have not been successful. As we approach this process with humility, we can move from viewing it as “getting in the way” to “showing us the way.” Without the humble recognition that we may do well in some areas and less well in others and that we can learn to improve, this process will be an imposed burden rather than an opportunity for growth.

Our next Northwest Commission accreditation site visit is scheduled for 2015. We have developed learning outcomes for all of our programs, and it is our expectation that we will undergo two annual cycles of collecting and analyzing assessment data and making changes in response.

One of the areas on campus that has not traditionally been assessment oriented is the College of Humanities. However, in the past seven years, under the leadership of a visionary dean, the college leadership has embraced this as a chance to improve. Each year the college hosts a summer retreat for faculty that they have titled Camp Assessalot. The retreat sequesters faculty from other distractions and, under college leadership, guides them through the rationale and process of assessment. Over these last few years the college program has gained faculty converts to the benefits of assessment. This is but one of many examples from our community where campus units are using the process as a path to stronger programs. I thank you all for your willingness—and some have even been pleasantly anxious—to help the university move forward in this way. I am confident that if approached meekly, the accreditation process will serve *us* rather than the reverse.

Seeing ourselves accurately applies not only to our personal professional pursuits but also to the community formed by this great institution. Understanding who we are institutionally—our beginnings, our unique aims, our special student body, our inspired board, and our place and role in the kingdom—is a blessed part of seeing ourselves accurately. This understanding does not threaten the need for and celebration of individual faculty accomplishments. Rather, with meekness this makes those accomplishments all the sweeter as they are seen to build and strengthen the university. Our clear view of who we are accelerates our progress as an institution.

One of our deans who spent two decades at a public university before joining us at BYU—roughly half of that in administrative leadership roles—recently told me, “Difficult decisions are much easier to make at BYU because of our shared vision of our mission. Because of that shared vision, egos and selfish desires take a backseat to the collective good.” Humbly seeing ourselves individually as part of a wonderful whole brings collegiality, collaboration, and cooperation rather than the bitter feuding that stereotypically characterizes higher education.

Learning to comfortably discover who we are, warts and all, has other important advantages. While we may not be content with our status—the quality and productivity of our academic service—true humility will spare us the burden of worrying about how *others* see us. Elder Maxwell taught, with his remarks directed to the BYU community, that seeking the meekness exemplified by the Lord will bring this profound blessing: “and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:29). He explained further:

This is a very special form of rest. It surely includes the rest resulting from the shedding of certain needless burdens: fatiguing insincerity, exhausting hypocrisy, and the strength-sapping quest for

recognition, praise, and power. Those of us who fall short, in one way or another, often do so because we carry such unnecessary and heavy baggage. ["Meek and Lowly," BYU devotional address, 21 October 1986]

In another setting Elder Maxwell taught how nurturing meekness purges from us the inordinate focus we often have on ourselves:

Without meekness, the conversational points we insist on making often take the form of "I"—that spearlike, vertical pronoun. ["Speaking Today: Meekness—A Dimension of True Discipleship," *Ensign*, March 1983, 71]

In a chapter entitled "Humility and Modesty" of their seminal book *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, psychologists Christopher Peterson of the University of Michigan and Martin E. P. Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania note that humble individuals are less driven to impress and dominate others, and they tend to be motivated less to collect special benefits for themselves. They observe further that there is a distinct benefit to being free from preoccupation with self—that of being free from the psychological burden of the need to maintain inflated self-images. (See Peterson and Seligman [Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004], 461–75.)

This first dimension of humility—being willing to understand and acknowledge accurately who we are—motivates us to focus less on what others think of us and more on what we think is important. It helps us direct our efforts to compete only with ourselves and our own histories rather than to compete with others. Perhaps this is what prompted the observation "People with humility don't think less of themselves. They just think about themselves less" (Ken Blanchard and Margret

McBride, *The One Minute Apology: A Powerful Way to Make Things Better* [New York: William Morrow, 2003], 77).

Appreciative View of Others

The first dimension of humility I have explored today entails the ability to see oneself accurately. The second common element of humility identified by behavioral scientists is the capacity to accurately see others and their strengths and weaknesses without experiencing feelings of inferiority or feeling threatened ourselves. The willingness and ability of the meek to recognize the skills and successes of others without self-criticism or self-pity places them in a fertile position for improvement. Our doctrine should make quite obvious the importance of this element of humility. We know who man is, his origins, his purpose here, and his potential. Surely that knowledge should engender an appreciative view of others that does not diminish our own standing. With the reminder of this perspective we can see colleagues here and elsewhere differently. While there may be a few issues on which we do not compromise, meekness allows us to approach our interactions with others on a foundation of civility and respect. This is so very important in carrying out the business of the university and in our involvement with our disciplinary colleagues elsewhere.

Acknowledging generously the good work of others requires a confident meekness that often does not come instinctively to humans but is critical to achieving excellence in an organizational setting. It requires humility to continually look for the accomplishments of others and commend and recognize them for those accomplishments. Jim Collins, a former faculty member of the Stanford Business School and author of the 2001 management best seller *Good to Great*, noted the importance of this trait in building successful business organizations:

[Top level] leaders are differentiated from other levels of leaders in that they have a wonderful blend of personal humility combined with extraordinary professional will. Understand that they are very ambitious; but their ambition, first and foremost, is for the company's success. They realize that the most important step they must make . . . is to subjugate their ego to the company's performance. [Quoted in Simon Tankard, "The Challenge of Change," *Business Brief*, August 2009]

It is in this vein that I wish to acknowledge the selfless service of our academic administrators and others who contribute through university service to the advancement of our work here. The work of deans and department chairs, as well as of committee chairs and members, is difficult and often thankless. Decisions must be made by these valued folks that affect their colleagues in significant ways—sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. With BYU's model of rotating academic leadership, these faculty administrators make difficult decisions, knowing that they will live subject to those decisions when they are replaced. I have heard one wise dean say repeatedly that administrators unselfishly do work that builds *other* faculty members' résumés.

I express my gratitude for what these chairs and deans do to build and enable their colleagues and the university. I also acknowledge with deep thanks the hard work of faculty curriculum committees, hiring committees, rank and status committees, assessment committees, faculty development committees, and so on. This labor reflects the unselfish mind-set of BYU faculty and comes because of the shared vision we enjoy there. Thank you.

In the context of accurately viewing others in nonthreatening ways, I might offer a word about students. Strong teaching is preeminent in who we are and what we value at BYU, and I commend you for your commitment to engaging, inspiring instruction. I see this clearly in

student comments. Occasionally we hear about a faculty member who is belittling, demeaning, or rude. Knowing who our students are and who we are, this has no place here. I stress the importance of reciprocal meekness as we interact with students. We demand such meekness of them, and they can rightfully expect the same of us. Perhaps a verse from Doctrine and Covenants 84 can serve to guide us in our interactions with students.

And if any man among you be strong . . . , let him take with him him that is weak, that he may be edified in all meekness, that he may become strong also. [D&C 84:106]

As we seek to elevate and inspire students "that [they] may become strong also," may there be rigor and lofty expectations and candid feedback. But in our rigor may meekness guide our responses to students, our classroom discussions, our office consultations, and our grading. Aside from the common decency, kindness, and courtesy that students should expect of teacher-scholars who are also disciples, if meekness is so important to learning, our students should see it modeled appropriately here.

One important facet of humility-inspired clarity in seeing others is gratitude. Humility within us at BYU spawns gratitude for strong mentors, responsive and helpful staff, ample and stable resources for teaching and research, a collegial environment, time to pursue the excitement of learning, extraordinary students—the list could go on and on. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

Our society is afflicted by a spirit of thoughtless arrogance unbecoming those who have been so magnificently blessed. How grateful we should be for the bounties we enjoy. Absence of gratitude is the mark of the narrow, uneducated mind. It bespeaks a lack of knowledge and the ignorance of self-sufficiency. . . .

Where there is appreciation, there is courtesy, there is concern for the rights and property of others. Without appreciation, there is arrogance and evil.

Where there is gratitude, there is humility, as opposed to pride. ["First Presidency Message: 'With All Thy Getting Get Understanding,'" Ensign, August 1988, 2–3]

In a higher education era of budget cuts, faculty furloughs, salary cuts, and discontinued programs, we at BYU have much to be grateful for. We have the support and trust of the board of trustees, whose generous appropriation of resources to the university is extraordinary at a time when so many other Church priorities are clear. I again express gratitude to our colleagues on the administrative side of the university who, despite several years of a challenging economy and their mandate to be fiscally self-sustaining, have economized and made available multiple positions from within their own ranks to augment the faculty ranks. While it may seem somehow counterintuitive, I believe meekly cultivating gratitude for any finite resource somehow extends that resource to our benefit.

An Openness to New Information

A third and final dimension to humility identified by social scientists that I would like to address today may be the most important and most relevant of the three for this community. Scholars have noted that true humility brings an openness to new information and a willingness to be taught. This would certainly be central in this business of education. Indeed, it would seem that humility is absolutely prerequisite to any learning. To acknowledge that there is something we don't know, that there is something new to discover or to study or to create, requires true meekness. Meekness, it would seem, does not just promote or catalyze learning; it activates learning.

Elder Maxwell described the intimate coupling between meekness and learning this way:

Meekness is a friend, not a foe, of true education. Stephen spoke of Moses: "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). Though Moses was a learned man, he was the most meek man "upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). So it was that he could and did learn things he "never had supposed" (Moses 1:10). ["Meek and Lowly"]

The meek humbly accept correction, recognizing that it puts them on the path to improvement. Catholic theologian and author Father Thomas Dubay observed:

*The humble person is open to being corrected, whereas the arrogant is clearly closed to it. Proud people are supremely confident in their own opinions and insights. No one can admonish them successfully. . . . **They** know—and that is the end of the matter. Filled as they are with their own views, the arrogant lack the capacity to see another view. [Thomas Dubay, *Authenticity: A Biblical Theology of Discernment* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 132; emphasis in original]*

Bishop Richard C. Edgley related the following account of an encounter between the Prophet Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, illustrating true humility in accepting correction:

In the presence of a rather large group of brethren, the Prophet severely chastised Brother Brigham for some failing in his duty. Everyone, I suppose somewhat stunned, waited to see what Brigham's response would be. After all, Brigham, who later became known as the Lion of the Lord, was no shrinking violet by any means. Brigham slowly rose to his feet, and in words that truly reflected his character and his humility, he simply bowed his head and said, "Joseph, what do you want me

to do?" The story goes that sobbing, Joseph ran from the podium, threw his arms around Brigham, and said in effect, "You passed, Brother Brigham, you passed" (see Truman G. Madsen, "Hugh B. Brown—Youthful Veteran," *New Era*, Apr. 1976, 16). ["The Empowerment of Humility," *Ensign*, November 2003, 98]

The meek not only *accept* correction, as shown by President Brigham Young, but they *seek* it. Dr. Atul Gawande is a Stanford-educated, Harvard-trained general and endocrine surgeon and now a faculty member at the Harvard Medical School. In a 2011 article in the *New Yorker*, Dr. Gawande wrote of how—having practiced surgery for nearly a decade and having performed more than 2,000 operations, most involving his specialty of endocrine surgery—he felt his skills had plateaued. His rates of surgical complications, a primary measure of surgical competence, moved lower and lower through the first few years of practice and then stopped moving.

Wanting to continue to improve, Dr. Gawande invited the retired surgeon from Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston under whom Dr. Gawande had trained during his residency to evaluate his work. Arrangements were made, and his mentor came into the operating room to observe. The mentor stood on a stool looking over Dr. Gawande's shoulder; critically observed the entire operation, shifting his position periodically to change his field of view; and scribbled copious notes. Following the surgery this senior mentor provided feedback to Dr. Gawande—direct and specific and objectively critical—regarding his surgical technique, his management of the operating room and surgical process, and his interaction with the surgical staff.

In the months that followed, at Dr. Gawande's request the senior mentor observed other operations in Dr. Gawande's practice and reviewed videotapes of surgical procedures

with him. Responding to the correction of his senior mentor, Dr. Gawande noted that his technique improved, he grew more confident in managing unexpected scenarios, and he was more comfortable in managing the operating room and assisting staff. Most significantly, at least to his patients, was that his rate of complications began again to fall. (See Atul Gawande, "Personal Best," *Annals of Medicine*, *New Yorker*, 3 October 2011, 44–53.) This is the account of a surgeon of superb medical training with experience and elite professional stature who was nevertheless meek enough to *invite* correction.

The scriptural promise and caution offered by Jacob in the Book of Mormon is pointedly relevant here, teaching us that regardless of station or training, we must seek and welcome correction:

And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned . . . , who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, . . . yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall . . . consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them.

But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever. [2 Nephi 9:42–43]

Students resonate when faculty members they admire recognize they are at the limit of their own understanding and model the humility to acknowledge their limits and determine to keep learning. It is a powerful faculty member who will admit to being wrong to a student. Imagine the impact when students see faculty who are willing to make a mistake and willing to admit and correct it.

My best teacher as an undergraduate student at BYU regularly discarded his carefully prepared lecture notes and started over in his lecture preparation. By contrast, my worst teacher in graduate school lectured from the yellowed notes of his graduate school

experience decades previous. Those meek enough to learn are better equipped to teach that process to students and to hold students to that standard in their own scholarship. I stress that modeling this trait to students should promote humility, not humiliation.

Conclusion

Given the necessity of humility in learning and teaching—that it is not only nice but necessary—one will logically ask, “Can humility be acquired?” The answer seems to be yes.

A recent study by Marriott School faculty Brad Owens reported in-depth interviews with business leaders at several hierarchical levels from a particular business sector. The study concluded that successful leaders are those whose management styles exemplify humility, enabling them to effectively model to followers how to grow (see Bradley P. Owens and David R. Hekman, “Modeling How to Grow: An Inductive Examination of Humble Leader Behaviors, Contingencies, and Outcomes,” *Academy of Management Journal* 55, no. 4 [August 2012]: 787–818). The implication is that in the kind of environment created by strong and meek leaders, subordinates can and do change, with an attendant change in the culture of the organization. The implications for this environment are obvious.

Benjamin Franklin, who was something of a Renaissance man known for his diverse contributions to humanity, wrote in his autobiography of a deliberate decision to seek greater humility:

A Quaker friend . . . kindly informed me that I was generally thought proud; that my pride show'd itself frequently in conversation; that I was not content with being in the right when discussing any point, but was overbearing, and rather insolent, of which he convinc'd me by mentioning several instances; I determined endeavouring to cure myself, if I could, of this vice or folly.

Mr. Franklin related that he focused on acquiring this trait for the better part of fifty years:

I cannot boast of much success in acquiring the reality of this virtue, but I had a good deal with regard to the appearance of it. I made it a rule to forbear all direct contradiction to the sentiments of others, and all positive assertion of my own. I even forbid myself . . . the use of every word or expression in the language that imported a fix'd opinion, such as certainly, undoubtedly, etc., and I adopted, instead of them, I conceive, I apprehend, or I imagine a thing to be so or so. . . . When another asserted something that I thought an error, I deny'd myself the pleasure of contradicting him abruptly, and of showing immediately some absurdity in his proposition. . . . I soon found the advantage of this change in my manner; the conversations I engag'd in went on more pleasantly. The modest way in which I propos'd my opinions procur'd them a readier reception and less contradiction; I had less mortification when I was found to be in the wrong, and I more easily prevail'd with others to give up their mistakes and join with me when I happened to be in the right.

He concluded with this pointed observation about the process of cultivating humility:

*In reality, there is, perhaps, no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself; . . . even if I could conceive that I had compleatly overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility. [Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography* (1731–1759), <http://www4.uwsp.edu/philosophy/dwarren/LOBenFranklin/AutobiographyBenjaminFranklin.pdf>]*

Section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants is entitled “the Lord’s Preface to the doctrines, covenants, and commandments given in this

dispensation” (header to D&C 1). It would seem logical then that the revelatory counsel in this section would position the Latter-day Saints for the learning the Lord intended them to receive. The elements of humility explored today are clearly manifest in these verses:

And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known;

And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed;

And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent;

And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time. [D&C 1:25–28]

I conclude with a hope and a prayer that we will seek earnestly this most important of virtues: meekness. May we be meekly determined to understand who we are—our strengths and weaknesses—in an objective way that will provide a reference point for improvement. May we meekly see and appreciate others and their skills and

accomplishments without being threatened, and may we be open in expressing those affirming observations to others. May we meekly welcome new ideas and new information from a variety of sources and be willing to accept and to invite correction. Social scientists are now confirming what heaven has known all along about the critical role of meekness in personal and professional progress.

The prophet Helaman, one of the fathers of the generation that would be privileged to welcome and host the visit of the Savior to this continent after His Resurrection, described the preparation of the people for that visit decades before the Lord’s arrival. Helaman’s description has been somewhat perplexing to me in the past, but it now comes into focus with improved understanding of the virtue that has been our topic today. Helaman wrote that his people “did wax stronger and stronger in their humility” (Helaman 3:35). As we embark on a new year of opportunity and promise, it is my hope that as faculty and as an institution we will wax stronger and stronger in humility and that, as our conference theme states, we will become the meek whom He will teach His way.