

Great Expectations

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My wife, Mary, and I are pleased to be with you. It is always a privilege to be at this unique and special university. There are many challenges that we face in our day. The world is literally in commotion. The coronavirus has impacted us all in unique and sundry ways. I will cover a few matters before I provide my principal message.

The United States national election has demonstrated a deeply divided citizenry. Regardless of your political views of that election, the First Presidency, in a letter dated October 6, asked individual members to “please strive to live the gospel in your own life by demonstrating Christlike love and civility in political discourse.”¹

As a Church, we do not get involved in partisan politics: “The Church affirms its institutional neutrality regarding political parties and candidates.”² There are a few matters that we consider important regardless of candidates or parties. We are committed to supporting the founding constitutional documents of the United

States—documents that in our doctrine were established “for the . . . protection of all flesh.”³ In other words, it was protection for all people in all nations. In addition, we always support and advocate for religious freedom for all people. We are also committed to doing everything in our power to build faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I spoke to the BYU faculty and staff last August.⁴ I mentioned that BYU has grown in both size and accomplishment. I indicated that knowledgeable friends had pointed out to me that BYU’s typical incoming class of about six thousand students is approximately one thousand more than the first-year classes at Harvard, Stanford, and Yale Universities combined. The average number of those admitted who had enrolled at those three universities is 1,633 each. If you look at a similar number of first-year students at BYU, including high school GPAs, ACT and SAT scores, and other relevant accomplishments, BYU compares very favorably.

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I actually believe all BYU students compare very favorably when you consider their preparation, accomplishments, and character. As leaders of the Church, we appreciate all our young people and are grateful when they are striving to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and are preparing themselves to help build the kingdom of God.

Blessed with Great Expectations

My talk today is titled “Great Expectations,” and in a few minutes I will provide the context for this title. Regardless of whether you have great expectations, I know your family, friends, and Church leaders have great expectations for you.

As I look back on our Church history, my heart rejoices when I think of how each generation has stood upon the shoulders of the previous generation. I also rejoice in reviewing the contributions of wave after wave of converts to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One of my favorite true accounts involves the dramatic immigration from Great Britain of new converts with great expectations. In June 1863, the renowned British novelist Charles Dickens went on board the passenger ship *Amazon*, which was bound for New York. The passengers were converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Dickens was responding to the attention and interest of the British public in both our faith and the immigrants who were departing for the American West. Dickens wrote: “I went on board their ship to bear testimony against them if they deserved it, as I fully believed they would; to my great astonishment they did not deserve it.”⁵ He was surprised by what he observed because of the disparaging reports of the Church in British media. He eloquently described these English converts as, “in their degree, the pick and flower of England.”⁶

I have appreciated many of Charles Dickens’s novels. His 1861 novel was titled *Great Expectations*. It was then and is now, one hundred fifty years after his death, a highly acclaimed novel, both with the public and literary critics.⁷ It is widely considered a masterpiece of English literature. The novel depicts the growth and personal development of an orphan named Pip. Some have described the moral of the story as being

that affection, loyalty, and conscience are more important than social advancement, wealth, and class. I like the fact that Dickens, two years later, in observing our church’s converts on the ship *Amazon*, could see those same admirable qualities in our members, who for the most part came from humble backgrounds.

I have titled my message “Great Expectations” not because of the Dickens connection but primarily because that title reflects the hopes and aspirations of our Heavenly Parents, of our Savior Jesus Christ, of your earthly parents, and of the leaders of the Church for each of you and for your generation. You are not perfect, but, as President Russell M. Nelson described you in a devotional here at BYU a year ago, “you are the children whom God chose to be part of His battalion during this great climax in the longstanding battle between good and evil—between truth and error.”⁸

With the great expectations with which you have been blessed, we would hope that this characterization would not make you prideful or even satisfied. Almost all of you are the recipients of eternally significant spiritual blessings. You are also blessed by the faithful contributions of Church members, many of modest means. Church members have always sacrificed for the rising generation. I suggest you contemplate what the Savior said about those who are blessed. In the Gospel of Luke, we read, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”⁹ In the Doctrine and Covenants, in the early days of the Restoration and referencing darkness reigning in the world, the Savior said, “For of him unto whom much is given much is required.”¹⁰

In view of the Savior’s teachings and His great expectations for you, I have chosen to speak about these expectations and what to avoid that would keep you from attaining them. One expectation we desire for you is that you stay on the covenant path and keep God’s commandments so you can return and live with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in the celestial kingdom with the fulness of happiness and joy promised those who keep the commandments of God.¹¹

I am confident we can have the joy and happiness that we desire here and now and that God

wants for us. What must we do to attain that joy and happiness?

You are at a critical threshold in life. You are busy getting an education, planning for the future, and planning to be able to support a family. Many of you have served missions and have callings in the Church and have found your eternal companion. You have learned that balancing all these expectations takes planning and hard work.

As I thought about the counsel that would be most important to you because of your great expectations, I decided that I will address two important categories:

1. Learning what is essential when the world is in commotion to protect and bless you and provide the happiness, peace, and success you desire
2. Avoiding detours and stumbling blocks that diminish this protection

In the Face of Chaos

Two months ago, I celebrated my eightieth birthday. This gives me a very long perspective on what is essential to provide protections. When Mary and I were still in our twenties in the 1960s, the turbulence, anger, and social unrest was similar to what we have experienced recently. We lived in the San Francisco Bay Area. The combination of racial unrest, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the unpopular Vietnam War, and a destabilizing drug culture resulted in demonstrations that included rioting and looting and the occupation by dissidents of administrative offices of major universities.

In the face of this chaos, we were blessed to receive counsel from President Harold B. Lee, who was the president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles at the time. We appreciated that counsel then and cherish it now.

President Lee's counsel, in addition to following the prophet, was for both families and individuals. First, build Zion in your hearts and in your homes. Second, be a light on the hill and an example in your community. And third, focus your vision and goals on the ordinances and principles taught in the temple. President Lee promised that we would be protected if we followed

these principles and that we could live anywhere in the world.

In my view, these principles are as relevant today as they were more than fifty years ago, and they apply to you today.

First, as you strive to build Zion in your hearts and homes, please understand that the eternal institution of the family is the foundation for happiness.

We are all members of families. We are children of God and part of His family. We are also part of the family into which we are born. Accordingly, a major goal is to commit to the eternal institution of the family. I would counsel you to find a righteous spouse who you admire and who will be your best friend. Marriage in this life is a sacred part of this eternal plan. In the world at large, many are choosing not to get married or are delaying marriage. The family is an eternal institution ordained of God¹² from before the foundation of the world.

I assure you that the joy, love, and fulfillment experienced in loving, righteous families produces the greatest possible happiness we can achieve, especially if we make our "home into a sanctuary of faith."¹³ It is also the foundation for a successful society.

Seeking marriage and having that as a righteous desire of your heart should be your goal. However, righteousness is its own reward and is not dependent on having marriage and children in our lives. We may not be married or blessed with children or have other desired blessings now. But the Lord has promised that the righteous who are faithful "may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness."¹⁴ President Lorenzo Snow taught, "There is no Latter-day Saint who dies after having lived a faithful life who will lose anything because of having failed to . . . [marry] when opportunities were not furnished him or her."¹⁵

Second, be a light on the hill and an example in your community. As you continue your education and then embark on your various occupations and responsibilities, you can be a powerful force for good. A very significant challenge will be to adhere to the scriptural injunction to live in the world but "not of the world."¹⁶ President Joseph

Fielding Smith, when he was an apostle, taught that “while we are . . . in the world, we are *not* of the world in the sense that we are under any necessity to partake of . . . evil customs, . . . fashions, . . . follies, false doctrines and theories.”¹⁷ In addition, your contribution to the place in which you live in a positive sense is part of your challenge if you are to be an example, be a light on the hill, share the gospel, and live in accordance with the teachings you have received at this great university.

Third, focus your vision and goals on the ordinances and principles taught in the temple. Despite the lack of righteousness in the world today, we live in a sacred, holy time. The Lord has prepared President Russell M. Nelson, our prophet, through many years of temple-related assignments to preside over the Church at a time when temples will truly dot the earth in unprecedented numbers.¹⁸ President Nelson commenced his service as our prophet by addressing us from the Salt Lake Temple. He asked us “to begin with the end in mind” and made it clear that “the ordinances of the temple” and the covenant pathway should be our primary goal.¹⁹ He has counseled us “to gather scattered Israel” “on both sides of the veil.”²⁰

Detours and Stumbling Blocks

I will now turn to the need to avoid some detours and stumbling blocks that diminish happiness, peace, and success. There are many I could mention. I will cover a few. Some of the most common and pernicious are addictions to alcohol, tobacco, vaping, and drugs and the distracting addictions to video games, social media, and pornography. These addictions have been stumbling blocks for the greatest number of people. Approximately 642,000 deaths annually in the U.S. are attributed to alcohol, smoking, and drugs.²¹ The internet downloads related to pornography are by all accounts shocking. These addictions destroy life, impair brain function, and destroy marriages. They also impact the ability to earn a living and work successfully. The best way to avoid these addictions is to never, ever be involved with them. As I said when I spoke here in February 2017, I cherish your stone-cold-sober

school reputation.²² I trust you are living up to that title! *Please avoid these addictions!* If you have challenges with any addictions, counsel with your bishop. The Church provides excellent counseling and support.

In addition to avoiding addictions, it is also important to avoid substituting the philosophies of men for the gospel of Jesus Christ. A great education can be an enormous blessing in fulfilling expectations and preparing to be “swallowed up in the will of the Father.”²³ President Nelson is an excellent example.

For some, education can also result in a stumbling block. Jacob, the brother of Nephi in the Book of Mormon, described both sides of this issue. He acknowledged that learning is good if we “hearken unto the counsels of God.”²⁴ On the other hand, learned men and women are foolish if “they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God.”²⁵

Some assume that what they are learning should supersede the doctrine established by the hand of the Lord. Some are impressed by the complexity of scientific or intellectual learning and are embarrassed by the simplicity of the Savior’s message.

The philosophies of men have often challenged faith in Jesus Christ and particularly in His Resurrection and in His Atonement. Let me share an example. In June 2019, my wife, Mary, and I were blessed to have an assignment in both Athens and Jerusalem. This gave us the opportunity of reviewing the apostle Paul’s visit to Mars Hill in Athens.

When the apostle Paul was on Mars Hill, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, he encountered “philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks.”²⁶ The Stoics believed the highest good was virtue, and the Epicureans believed the highest good was pleasure. Many Stoics had become proud and used philosophy as “a cloak for . . . ambition and iniquity.”²⁷ Many Epicureans had become hedonists who took as their motto “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”²⁸ Paul “preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”²⁹ The philosophers were more interested in telling or hearing “some new thing.”³⁰ In the end, some mocked and were dismissive of Paul’s

message.³¹ When we refuse to accept simple gospel truths for what they are, we are rejecting the Savior’s message and His doctrine.³²

Daily consecration is a great blessing. Heroic gestures or striving for recognition as a substitute for daily consecration should be avoided. In a lecture here at Brigham Young University many years ago, my friend James S. Jardine indicated that when he was a student, he thought “of consecrating [his] life in one grand, heroic gesture” but came to realize that “consecration is not a once-in-a-lifetime event; it is a daily devotion.”³³

When I was young, I too wanted to prove myself through some heroic gesture. My great-grandfather, David Patten Kimball, was one of the young men who spent hours in the frigid Sweetwater River carrying members of the Martin Handcart Company across that icy water.³⁴ That sounded like a significant kind of consecration. Later, as I visited with my grandfather, Crozier Kimball, he explained that when President Brigham Young had sent the men on their rescue mission, he had instructed them to do everything they possibly could to save the handcart company. Their consecration was specifically to “follow the prophet.” My grandfather told me that consistent, faithful dedication to one’s duty or to a principle is to be much admired. I now understand that as heroic as it was for David Patten Kimball to help rescue the pioneers, it would be equally heroic today to follow our prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, by striving to gather Israel on both sides of the veil and helping rescue them.

Some members profess that they would commit themselves with enthusiasm if given some great calling that provided recognition, but they do not find gathering Israel worthy of or sufficiently heroic for their sustained effort. God uses us “not according to our works, but according to his own purpose.”³⁵ We are at the very least unwise if our consecration is conditional or based on recognition or does not involve daily devotion, including daily repentance.

Avoid foolishness that can also be both a detour and a stumbling block. In the Gospel of Mark, the Savior enumerated some of the things that can defile man. He said:

*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.*³⁶

Definitions in the Greek Dictionary of the New Testament in *Strong’s Concordance* for the Greek word translated as *foolishness* in chapter 7 of the Gospel of Mark include “senselessness” and “egotism.”³⁷ These definitions are derived from a Greek word meaning mindless, stupid, ignorant, egotistic, rash, or unbelieving. Most of the scriptures that use the word imply lack of wisdom. These are all serious matters in their own right. Not only do these serious matters exist, but they are also accentuated in our day because of modern technology. Many of them come directly into our homes.

Some are using the internet to create hatred and disunity by only portraying one side of an issue, judging others by one misstatement that is not consistent with how a person has lived their life, and assuming that one communication reveals the inner self and ignoring a commendable life. Tech addiction, particularly pornography, is a serious problem. The sad consequences of this conduct could have been taken from the scriptural warning “Wickedness never was happiness.”³⁸

My counsel is to avoid all evil conduct that can block happiness, peace, and success. Such evil conduct is contrary to God’s commandments and is usually deemed to be a sin. Throughout my life, parents and teachers and mentors have often used the phrase “Avoid evil like the plague.”

In a general sense, I always understood that even getting close to a plague could have dire consequences—it was something you definitely avoided. I never thought I would live in a time when a worldwide coronavirus pandemic would have much the same impact as a global plague. Now I have a better understanding of the concept of avoiding evil like the plague.

It has not been my intention to chronicle all the evils and vices in the world. I am confident that your generation has been taught this well. I am concerned that immorality in all its various manifestations should be avoided.³⁹

Do not fall into the worldly trap of calling “evil good, and good evil.”⁴⁰ I would also caution you to not allow the desires of your heart to be directed primarily to worldly aspirations, goals, or accomplishments that, while not necessarily evil in themselves, can become stumbling blocks.⁴¹ President Spencer W. Kimball referenced Doctrine and Covenants 1:16, which reads:

*They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol.*⁴²

President Kimball warned that idols can be material things or intangible things like credentials, titles, and other worldly pursuits if they become our primary goal and emphasis that deflect us “from the path to godhood.”⁴³

Why was President Kimball concerned that these could become idols? Why is it that such aspirations can become stumbling blocks? The answer is contained in King Benjamin’s counsel about becoming the sons and daughters of Christ. He taught:

*For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?*⁴⁴

In Conclusion

My challenge to you wonderful students is to learn what is essential when the world is in commotion to protect and bless you and provide the happiness, peace, and success you desire. Please avoid detours and stumbling blocks that diminish this protection.

My prayer is that you students will have some sense of how precious you are and how much you have to offer. My heart has been filled with gratitude for what you have already accomplished all over the world. No generation has been better prepared for the important times that lie ahead.

Our great expectation for you is that you will love, serve, and worship the Savior and that you will bless the world like no other generation. Be determined to continue on the covenant path and to be righteous. With your BYU education,

you can be a means of breaking down prejudice, bringing the Church more fully out of obscurity, and building faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is my prayer for you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. “First Presidency Encourages Latter-day Saints in the United States to Vote,” Church of Jesus Christ Newsroom, 6 October 2020, newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/first-presidency-letter-united-states-election-2020.
2. “First Presidency Encourages.”
3. D&C 101:77; see also verses 77–80.
4. See Quentin L. Cook, “Be Not Weary in Well-Doing,” BYU university conference address, 24 August 2020.
5. Charles Dickens, “Bound for the Great Salt Lake,” *The Uncommercial Traveller and Reprinted Pieces, Etc.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 232.
6. Dickens, *Uncommercial Traveller*, 224.
7. See Robert Gottlieb, “Robert Gottlieb on Dickensworld—the Great Novelist’s Grand Universe,” Book Review: Nonfiction, *New York Times*, 6 November 2020 (book review of A. N. Wilson, *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* [New York: HarperCollins, 2020]). “In the 21st century, the novel retains good ratings among literary critics, and in 2003 it was ranked 17th on the BBC’s The Big Read poll” (Wikipedia, s.v. “*Great Expectations*”).
8. Russell M. Nelson, “The Love and Laws of God,” BYU devotional address, 17 September 2019.
9. Luke 12:48.
10. D&C 82:3.
11. See Mosiah 2:41; see also 2 Nephi 2:25.
12. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” (23 September 1995).
13. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming Exemplary Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, November 2018.
14. Mosiah 2:41; see also Richard G. Scott, “The Joy of Living the Great Plan of Happiness,” *Ensign*, November 1996.
15. Lorenzo Snow, “Discourse by President Lorenzo Snow,” *Millennial Star* 61, no. 35 (31 August 1899): 547.

16. John 15:19; see also L. Tom Perry, “In the World,” *Ensign*, May 1988.

17. Joseph Fielding Smith, *CR*, October 1916, 70; emphasis added.

18. See Scott Taylor, “Here Are the 21 Temples That Had—or Will Have—Groundbreakings in 2020,” *Temples*, *Church News*, 22 October 2020, thechurchnews.com/temples/2020-10-22/21-temples-groundbreakings-in-2020-195241.

19. Russell M. Nelson, live broadcast from the annex of the Salt Lake Temple, 16 January 2018; transcript at Camille West, “New First Presidency Speaks to Members Worldwide,” *Church News*, 16 January 2018, churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/new-first-presidency-speaks-to-members-worldwide?lang=eng.

20. Russell M. Nelson, “Sisters’ Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” *Ensign*, November 2018. See also Russell M. Nelson, in Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” worldwide youth devotional, 3 June 2018, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2018/08-se/hope-of-israel?lang=eng; Nelson, “The Gathering of Scattered Israel,” *Ensign*, November 2006; and Nelson, quoted in Scott Taylor, “President Nelson Speaks to 65,000 Latter-day Saints at NFL Stadium on What It Really Means to Gather Israel,” *Leaders and Ministry*, *Church News*, 11 February 2019, thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2019-02-11/president-nelson-speaks-to-65000-latter-day-saints-on-what-it-really-means-to-gather-israel-48971.

21. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) purports that more than 95,000 people die annually from excessive alcohol use, “cigarette smoking is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths per year,” and more than 67,000 deaths per year are due to drug overdose (“Deaths from Excessive Alcohol Use in the U.S.,” Alcohol and Public Health, CDC, cdc.gov/alcohol/features/excessive-alcohol-deaths.html; “Fast Facts,” Smoking and Tobacco Use, CDC, cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fast_facts/index.htm; “Drug Overdose Deaths,” Opioid Overdose, CDC, cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html).

22. See Quentin L. Cook, “A Banquet of Consequences: The Cumulative Result of All

Choices,” BYU devotional address, 7 February 2017.

23. Mosiah 15:7; see also Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, November 1995.

24. 2 Nephi 9:29.

25. 2 Nephi 9:28.

26. Acts 17:18.

27. Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin, and Company, 1883), 387.

28. Farrar, *Life of St. Paul*, 387; see also Isaiah 22:13.

29. Acts 17:18.

30. Acts 17:21.

31. See Acts 17:32.

32. See Quentin L. Cook, “Looking Beyond the Mark,” *Ensign*, March 2003.

33. James S. Jardine, “Consecration and Learning,” in *On Becoming a Disciple-Scholar: Lectures Presented at the Brigham Young University Honors Program Discipline and Discipleship Lecture Series*, ed. Henry B. Eyring (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 78.

34. See *No Unhallowed Hand, 1846–1893*, vol. 2 of *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020), 237.

35. 2 Timothy 1:9.

36. Mark 7:21–22; emphasis added.

37. See Mark 7:22, s.v. “foolishness,” on page 361 of the Main Concordance in *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press, 1890); see also *aphrosune* at word number 877 and *aphron* at word number 878 on page 18 of the Greek Dictionary of the New Testament in *Strong’s Concordance*.

38. Alma 41:10.

39. Alexander Pope wrote:

*Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.*
[*An Essay on Man* (1733–1734), Epistle II, lines 217–20]

40. 2 Nephi 15:20.

41. See Quentin L. Cook, “Valiant in the Testimony of Jesus,” *Ensign*, November 2016.

42. D&C 1:16; quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, “First Presidency Message: The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign*, June 1976.

43. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 40.

44. Mosiah 5:13.