

“Look unto Me in Every Thought; Doubt Not, Fear Not”

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I am grateful to be with you this morning. Susan and I always love returning to the Brigham Young University campus. And gathering together in person today is a particular blessing after so many months of restrictions and gazillions of Zoom meetings.

I pray the Holy Ghost will enlighten and edify all of us as we consider together the importance of looking to the Savior in all that we think and all that we do.

The Blessings of a Challenging Year

For all of us, the past year has been unlike any other year that we have ever experienced. Individuals, families, and the Lord’s restored Church have faced great uncertainty and challenging constraints. Customary lifestyles have been altered dramatically, and some of our most cherished opportunities for worship and service have been curtailed and even halted.

But we also have been blessed to learn remarkable lessons about ourselves, our families, our

communities, and the things that should matter most in our lives. Constraints have compelled us to discover inspired and improved ways of overcoming, learning, adapting, prioritizing, serving, working, and ministering.

For example, today missionaries around the world are finding, teaching, and testifying in ways that could not have been imagined just fourteen months ago. In fact, in many missions—not in all of the missions, but in many—the elders and sisters are effectively using technology to find, teach, baptize, and retain more people than ever before.

One country that had previously averaged several thousand social media referrals every month now receives tens of thousands. The major question for many missionaries in that nation used to be “How do we find people to teach?” Now the question has changed to “How do we teach all of the people we have found?”

And the use of technology greatly has improved the capacity of members to participate in lessons with the full-time missionaries and to

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welcome and fellowship the individuals and families being taught.

Approximately one year ago, all of the temples were closed. Today, all but one of the temples again are open at various phases of operation, as determined by local conditions and government guidelines. Six of the temples are closed for extensive renovation. This unprecedented global closure expedited an in-depth assessment of all temple processes and procedures that will bless patrons now and for generations to come.

For example, the ever-increasing number of temples heightens the need to translate and record sacred materials in many more languages. The constraints caused by the pandemic required a number of production companies to discover new remote ways to continue doing voice-over work for animations, TV productions, and language-based audio. The increased demand for these services pushed product-development opportunities in the marketplace at a very fast pace. Building upon and benefiting from these technological advancements, Church engineers have developed high-quality and secure methods of internet-based recording at the very time that temple construction is accelerating dramatically. Brothers and sisters, there is no such thing as a coincidence in the work of the Lord.

In 2020, ground was broken for twenty-one new temples. In addition, forty-one temples presently are in various stages of construction or renovation. And miraculously, most of those temples are meeting original building timelines in spite of the labor, supply chain, and other challenges that were caused by the pandemic.

If any of you are uncertain about the future of temple work and service, I invite you to reflect on the fact that twenty new temples were announced by President Russell M. Nelson in general conference just two weeks ago. As a point of comparison to President Nelson's recent announcement, there were eight temples operating in 1952—the year I was born. Surely the Lord is “able to do [His] own work.”¹

The apostle Paul aptly described some of the juxtaposed conditions we face in our contemporary world:

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

*Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*²

I personally find great reassurance in the well-known statement by the Prophet Joseph Smith:

*The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.*³

The Blessings of Challenging Years Yet to Come

Now, please permit me to be personal as I set the stage for the next point I want to emphasize.

Susan and I are the parents of three sons. As these boys were growing up, they all loved and participated in sports of every kind. And for our family, March Madness and the NCAA basketball tournament every year always was a highlight. We each carefully researched and filled out our brackets. The trash talking started early. And the winner of our annual competition was granted special recognition and privileges for the remainder of the year. We still participate in this fun tradition with our sons, their wives, and all of our nineteen grandchildren.

Over the years, Susan became especially skillful at picking the winners and losers. In a majority-male household, she delighted in and absolutely relished beating the rest of us almost every year. She continues to derive great satisfaction from her victories to this very day!

My customary enjoyment of March Madness this year, however, was interrupted by an episode that is instructive for all of us. The basketball team from Oral Roberts University, a Christian university located in Tulsa, Oklahoma, shocked the sports world by defeating powerhouse teams from the Ohio State University and the University of Florida in the early rounds of the tournament. The

ensuing publicity emphasized the Cinderella-like story of the team's success.

However, on March 23, an opinion column was published in *USA Today* with the headline "Oral Roberts University Isn't the Feel Good March Madness Story We Need." The article concluded as follows:

There is no way to separate their men's basketball team from the dangers of their religious dogma, no matter how many top seeds they defeat.

Often, athletic accomplishments and victories on the court make up for moral failings all the time. In this case though, whatever the Oral Roberts men's basketball team manages to do on the court can't obscure the dangerous and hateful ideology of its core institution. It's always nice to root for the underdog, but in this case, there's very little to actually cheer about.⁴

Then, on March 25, a second opinion article was published in *USA Today* with the title "No, Oral Roberts University Basketball Doesn't Deserve to Be Canceled from NCAA Sweet 16." The article begins with this statement:

In the age of social media hot takes, apparently, we aren't allowed to enjoy good things. Even a good sports story has to become a flashpoint in our ongoing cultural battles.⁵

The conclusion of this episode is still being written. And I believe this story and many others like it inexorably and inevitably will impact Brigham Young University and each of you—in both expected and unexpected ways.

Cancel culture is not new. Lucifer attempted to cancel the Eternal Father's plan of happiness and the mission of the Redeemer, even the Lord Jesus Christ. The Pharisees and scribes sought to cancel the teachings, influence, and life of the Savior. Critics, apostates, and enemies relentlessly attempted to cancel Joseph Smith. Cancel culture is not new; it always has been and always will be with us until the Savior returns to the earth to rule and reign in righteousness.

But "no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing"!

Look to the Savior

I believe we will be able to discern the blessings in the challenges yet to come as we "look unto [the Savior] in every thought; doubt not, fear not."⁶

The Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate and enduring source of light and truth that enables us to press forward through the increasing and intensifying latter-day distractions, diversions, and commotion. He also is the fount of the solace that can soothe our souls.

After the Crucifixion of the Savior, "Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them"⁷ discovered the stone rolled away from the sepulchre wherein the Lord's body had been placed:

And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

*And it came to pass, as **they were much perplexed** thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:*

*And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, **Why seek ye the living among the dead?***

*He is not here, but is risen: **remember how he spake unto you** when he was yet in Galilee,*

Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

And they remembered his words.⁸

In this episode we learn that the perplexity experienced by these noble women began to be relieved as they responded to the admonition to look to and seek Jesus and remember His words. As we confront the prophesied challenges of our day, I believe that same pattern "will aid me and you In the glorious cause of truth."⁹

"Look unto [the Savior] in every thought; doubt not, fear not."

Recall how Alma emphasized a similar theme of looking to God as he taught and testified to his son Helaman:

*O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it prepared for them, that **if they would look** they*

might live; even so it is with us. The way is prepared, and if we will look we may live forever.

*And now, my son, see that ye take care of these sacred things, yea, see that ye **look to God and live**. Go unto this people and declare the word, and be sober.*¹⁰

As disciples of the Savior and members of His restored and living Church, we have a distinctive responsibility to look to Him, to listen to His words, to learn from Him, and to walk in the meekness of His spirit.¹¹ As we do so, we will witness again and again that His ways and the work of His servants typically differ from and, in many instances, contradict secular philosophies and patterns and long-established traditions.

In my study of the Book of Mormon, I often pay particular attention to the ways the Nephites prepared for their battles against the Lamanites. I have noted that the people of Nephi “were aware of the intent of [their enemies], and therefore they did prepare to meet them.”¹² The following description from Alma 49 is particularly relevant for us this morning:

*Behold, to [the Lamanites] uttermost astonishment, [Captain Moroni and his armies] were prepared for [the Lamanites], in a manner which never had been known among the children of Lehi.*¹³

Brothers and sisters, this is not simply an interesting historical account. Precisely because the Book of Mormon was written for our day, we can learn valuable lessons from the voices that speak to us from the dust and then prepare to meet our trials and difficulties, whatever and wherever they may be, “in a manner which never had been known.”

“Look unto [the Savior] in every thought; doubt not, fear not.”

BYU’s Second Century

We should not simply follow the established or emerging patterns of other universities to address the challenges we do now and will yet face. We can, we should, and we must look unto the Savior in every thought to find every solution and to make every decision. At BYU we can truly focus on the spiritual and practical substance of

solutions and not just on superficial symbolism. We should be unique in striking at the root of important and timely issues and not be merely one of the thousands hacking at the branches. By looking unto the Lord, we can fulfill our remarkable role and responsibility “in a manner which never had been known.”

Brigham Young University has a most distinctive mission and purpose:

*The mission of Brigham Young University—founded, supported, and guided by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—is to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life.*¹⁴

As described in the Aims of a BYU Education:

The founding charge of BYU is to teach every subject with the Spirit. It is not intended “that all of the faculty should be categorically teaching religion constantly in their classes, but . . . that every . . . teacher in this institution would keep his [or her] subject matter bathed in the light and color of the restored gospel.”

*This ideal arises from the common purpose of all education at BYU—to build testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. A shared desire to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118) knits BYU into a unique educational community. The students, faculty, and staff in this community possess a remarkable diversity of gifts, but they all think of themselves as brothers and sisters seeking together to master the academic disciplines while remaining mastered by the higher claims of discipleship to the Savior.*¹⁵

As I was thinking about the mission of BYU and preparing for this opportunity to speak with you today, a wonderful memory came to my mind.

On October 10, 1975, I was twenty-three years old, recently married, and a senior at BYU. That day I attended the weekly devotional and listened to President Spencer W. Kimball deliver his landmark message “The Second Century of Brigham Young University.” Among the Church and university leaders seated on the stand were Neal A. Maxwell, the commissioner of Church Education, Dallin H. Oaks, the president of the university, and Jeffrey R. Holland, the dean of Religious Instruction.

President Kimball's instruction that day was inspiring, edifying, and prophetic. He reviewed key aspects of the university's first century of service and described both opportunities and challenges for the university's second century. Listening to the president and prophet of the Lord's restored Church that day was a historic event and a most memorable experience for me.

We are approaching the halfway mark of the second century of BYU, and I believe it is an appropriate time to consider where we are and what may be coming next.

As I recently reread and studied President Kimball's address, I selected for us to review six of his statements about the responsibilities we bear today. I will read the quotes and provide no commentary. President Kimball's vision for, aspirations about, and warnings to Brigham Young University speak for themselves.

As I read these quotations, I invite you to consider how these teachings apply to both individuals and the institution.

Statement 1: "I see even more . . . a widening gap between this university and other universities both in terms of purposes and in terms of directions."¹⁶

Statement 2: "We hope that our friends, and even our critics, will understand why we must resist anything that would rob BYU of its basic uniqueness in its second century. . . ."

"As the late President Stephen L Richards once said, 'Brigham Young University will never surrender its spiritual character to sole concern for scholarship.' BYU will be true to its charter and to such addenda to that charter as are made by living prophets."¹⁷

Statement 3: "This university is not of the world any more than the Church is of the world, and it must not be made over in the image of the world."¹⁸

Statement 4: "It is the truth that sets men free. BYU, in its second century, must become the last remaining bastion of resistance to the invading ideologies that seek control of curriculum as well as classroom. We do not resist such ideas because we fear them, but because they are false. BYU, in its second century, must continue to resist false fashions in education, staying with those

basic principles that have proved right and have guided good men and women and good universities over the centuries. This concept is not new, but in the second hundred years we must do it even better.

"When the pressures mount for us to follow the false ways of the world, we hope in the years yet future that those who are part of this university and the Church Educational System will not attempt to counsel the board of trustees to follow false ways."¹⁹

Statement 5: "Education on this campus deliberately and persistently concerns itself with 'education for eternity,' not just for time. The faculty has a double heritage that they must pass along: the secular knowledge that history has washed to the feet of mankind along with the new knowledge brought by scholarly research, and also the vital and revealed truths that have been sent to us from heaven."²⁰

Statement 6: "Gospel methodology, concepts, and insights can help us to do what the world cannot do in its own frame of reference.

"In some ways the Church Educational System, in order to be unique in the years that lie ahead, may have to break with certain patterns of the educational establishment. When the world has lost its way on matters of principle, we have an obligation to point the way. We can, as Brigham Young hoped we would, 'be a people of profound learning pertaining to the things of the world,' but without being tainted by what he regarded as 'the pernicious, atheistic influences' that flood in unless we are watchful. Our scholars, therefore, must be sentries as well as teachers!"²¹

"Therefore, What?"

This morning my intent has been to (1) summarize a few of the blessings of a challenging year that is now behind us, (2) discuss the blessings of the challenging years that are before us, (3) emphasize the essential importance of looking to the Savior in every thought, doubting and fearing not, and (4) consider the distinctive mission of Brigham Young University and reflect on the second century of this university using the teachings of President Spencer W. Kimball. I hope something that has been repeated, rereviewed, or reinforced

today will lead to additional pondering, praying, counseling together, and inspired action.

I have said and provided nothing new. And I am quite sure you are not surprised that a member of the Twelve has reminded all of us to look to and learn from the Savior. I simply and sincerely pray the reminder is timely and helpful.

In my university conference address at BYU in 2017, I described how President Boyd K. Packer often would ask during our discussions in the Quorum of the Twelve, “Therefore, what?”²²

I understood his question to mean, “So what spiritually significant difference will this idea, proposal, or course of action make in the lives of Church members? Will it really bless those whom we serve?”

President Packer was inviting us to consider the value and long-term implications of the matter about which we were counseling. I have found the question “Therefore, what?” to be most helpful in focusing my thinking about an issue and in identifying the things that matter most.

So, you may be asking, “Brother Bednar, what is the ‘therefore, what?’ of your message to us?” My answer to my own question comes in the form of several questions that may serve as spiritual catalysts to individual and collective reflection, evaluation, and action.

The following questions are intended to be illustrative; they certainly are not exhaustive. I am confident that as you continue to ponder and pray about the issues we have addressed this morning, you will identify and pose far better questions and receive inspiration to find the needed answers.

Question 1: At BYU in the second half of the second century, will the light and image of the Savior shine ever brighter in our countenances, in our thinking, in our teaching, and in our scholarly work and writing—and thereby provide needed illumination in a darkening world?

Question 2: At BYU in the second half of the second century, will we employ more effectively gospel methodology, concepts, and insights to address the root causes of significant problems—and thereby do what the world will not or cannot do in its own frame of reference?

Question 3: At BYU in the second half of the second century, will we become ever more vigilant and valiant as both sentries and teachers—and thereby stand firm against any and all influences that would diminish the university’s fundamental uniqueness?

Question 4: At BYU in the second half of the second century, will we look to the Savior in every thought—and thereby doubt not and fear not?

Promise and Testimony

I commend you for your righteous desires and devoted service. Surely, the second half of the second century of Brigham Young University will require the best of all of us—and then some.

As an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I invoke these blessings upon you, that as you look to the Savior and trust in Him, you will be blessed with hope to overcome perplexity, with spiritual settledness to cut through commotion, with ears to hear and a heart to always remember the word of the Lord, and with the discernment to see things as they really are.

I joyfully declare my witness that Jesus Christ is the Beloved, the Only Begotten, and the living Son of the living God. I witness that He is divine, that He is real, and that He lives. The tomb is empty, for He is risen—and He lives.

I testify that the Eternal Father and Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith, thus initiating the Restoration in the dispensation of the fulness of times. And brother and sisters, I witness that the Restoration is ongoing.

I declare my witness and invoke these blessings upon you in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 2 Nephi 27:20, 21.
2. 2 Corinthians 4:8–9.
3. Joseph Smith, letter to John Wentworth, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1842): 709; text standardized; HC 4:540; Joseph Smith, “The Wentworth Letter,” *Ensign*, July 2002.
4. Hemal Jhaveri, “Oral Roberts University Isn’t the Feel Good March Madness Story We Need,” Opinion, For the Win, *USA Today*, 23 March 2021,

ftw.usatoday.com/2021/03/oral-roberts-ncaa-anti-lgbtq-code-of-conduct.

5. Ed Stetzer, “No, Oral Roberts University Basketball Doesn’t Deserve to Be Canceled from NCAA Sweet 16,” Opinion, *USA Today*, 25 March 2021, [usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/03/25/oral-roberts-university-basketball-deserve-cancel-culture-golden-knights-column/6994502002](https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/03/25/oral-roberts-university-basketball-deserve-cancel-culture-golden-knights-column/6994502002).

6. Doctrine and Covenants 6:36.

7. Luke 24:10.

8. Luke 24:3–8; emphasis added.

9. “Let Us All Press On,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 243.

10. Alma 37:46–47; emphasis added.

11. See Doctrine and Covenants 19:23.

12. Alma 2:12; emphasis added.

13. Alma 49:8; emphasis added.

14. Mission of Brigham Young University (4 November 1981).

15. Aims of a BYU Education (1 March 1995); quoting Spencer W. Kimball, “Education for Eternity,” pre-school address to BYU faculty and staff, 12 September 1967, 11.

16. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.

17. Kimball, “Second Century.”

18. Kimball, “Second Century.”

19. Kimball, “Second Century.”

20. Kimball, “Second Century”; quoting Kimball, “Education for Eternity,” 1.

21. Kimball, “Second Century”; quoting Brigham Young, “Remarks,” *Deseret News Weekly*, 6 June 1860, 97; also quoting Young, in letter to his son Alfales Young, 20 October 1875.

22. See David A. Bednar, “‘Walk in the Meekness of My Spirit’ (D&C 19:23),” BYU university conference address, 28 August 2017.